MARCUS AURELIUS

MEDITATIONS

TRANSLATED
WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY
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PENGUIN BOOKS
1964

BOOK ONE

1. Courtesy and serenity of temper I first learnt to know from my grandfather Verus.

2. Manliness without ostentation I learnt from what I have heard and remember of my father.

3. My mother set me an example of piety and generosity, avoidance of all uncharitableness – not in actions only, but in thought as well – and a simplicity of life quite unlike the usual habits of the rich.

4. To my great-grandfather I owed the advice to dispense with the education of the schools and have good masters at home instead – and to realize that no expense should be grudged for this purpose.

5. It was my tutor who dissuaded me from patronizing Green or Blue [1] at the races, or Light or Heavy [2] in the ring; and encouraged me not to be afraid of work, to be sparing in my wants, attend to my own needs, mind my own business, and never listen to gossip.

6. Thanks to Diognetus [3] I learnt not to be absorbed in trivial pursuits; to be sceptical of wizards and wonder-workers with

1. The colours of the rival charioteers in the Circus. Roman enthusiasm for these races was unbounded; successful drivers earned large fortunes and became popular idols.

2. In one form of gladiatorial combat (the 'Thracian') the opponents were armed with light round bucklers; in another (the 'Samnite') they carried heavy oblong shields.

3. The painter and philosopher to whom Marcus, as a boy of eleven, owed his first acquaintance with Stoicism. Nothing is known of Bacchius, Tandasis, or Marcian.

their tales of spells, exorcisms, and the like; to eschew cock-fighting and other such distractions; not to resent outspokenness; to familiarize myself with philosophy, beginning with Bacchius and going on to Tandasis and Marcian; to write compositions in my early years; and to be ardent for the plank-and-skin pallet and other rigours of the Greek discipline.

7. From Rusticus [1] I derived the notion that my character needed training and care, and that I must not allow myself to be led astray into a sophist's enthusiasm for concocting speculative treatises, edifying homilies, or imaginary sketches of The Ascetic or The Altruist. He also taught me to avoid rhetoric, poetry, and verbal conceits, affectations of dress at home, and other such lapses of taste, and to imitate the easy epistolary style of his own letter written at Sinuessa to my mother. If anyone, after falling out with me in a moment of temper, showed signs of wanting to make peace again, I was to be ready at once to meet them half-way. Also I was to be accurate in my reading, and not content with a mere general idea of the meaning; and not to let myself be too quickly convinced by a glib tongue. Through him, too, I came to know Epictetus's *Dissertations*, of which he gave me a copy from his library.

8. Apollonius [2] impressed on me the need to make decisions for myself instead of depending on the hazards of chance, and never for a moment to leave reason out of sight. He also schooled me to meet spasms of acute pain, the loss of my son, and the tedium of a chronic ailment with the same unaltered

1. Q. Junius Rusticus, a Stoic professor who was the law-tutor and friend of Marcus.

2. A teacher of philosophy who came to Rome from Chalcedon. When first summoned by Marcus to the palace, he is said to have replied, 'The master ought not to come to the pupil, but the pupil to the master.'

composure. He himself was a living proof that the fieriest energy is not incompatible with the ability to relax. His expositions were always a model of clarity; yet he was evidently one who rated practical experience and an aptitude for teaching philosophy as the least of his accomplishments. It was he, moreover, who taught me how to accept the pretended favours of friends without either lowering my own self-respect or giving the impression of an unfeeling indifference.

9. My debts to Sextus [1] include kindliness, how to rule a household with paternal authority, the real meaning of the Natural Life, an unselfconscious dignity, an intuitive concern for the interests of one's friends, and a good-natured patience with amateurs and visionaries. The aptness of his courtesy to each individual lent a charm to his society more potent than any flattery, yet at the same time it exacted the complete respect of all present. His manner, too, of determining and systematizing the essential rules of life was as comprehensive as it was methodical. Never displaying a sign of anger nor any kind of emotion, he was at once entirely imperturbable and yet full of kindly affection. His approval was always quietly and undemonstratively expressed, and he never paraded his encyclopaedic learning.

10. It was the critic Alexander [2] who put me on my guard against unnecessary fault-finding. People should not be sharply corrected for bad grammar, provincialisms, or mispronunciation; it is better to suggest the proper expression by tactfully introducing it oneself in, say, one's reply to a question or one's acquiescence in their sentiments, or into a friendly discussion of the topic itself (not of the diction), or by some other suitable form of reminder.

1. A native of Chaeronea in Boeotia and the grandson of Plutarch. One of Marcus's earliest instructors in philosophy.

2. A Greek and a scholar of repute, known as 'the Grammarian'.

11. To my mentor Fronto [1] I owe the realization that malice, craftiness, and duplicity are the concomitants of absolute power; and that our patrician families tend for the most part to be lacking in the feelings of ordinary humanity.

12. Alexander the Platonist [2] cautioned me against frequent use of the words 'I am too busy' in speech or correspondence, except in cases of real necessity; saying that no one ought to shirk the obligations due to society on the excuse of urgent affairs.

13. Catulus the Stoic [3] counselled me never to make light of a friend's rebuke, even when unreasonable, but to do my best to restore myself to his good graces; to speak up readily in commendation of my instructors, as we read in the memoirs of Domitius and Athenodotus; and to cultivate a genuine affection for my children.

14. From my brother Severus [4] I learnt to love my relations, to

1. M. Cornelius Fronto, a celebrated pleader and teacher of rhetoric and reckoned inferior only to Cicero as an orator. He was entrusted with the education of the future co-emperors Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus. The published edition of Fronto's correspondence, containing many of his letters to them and their replies, throws much incidental light on the character and habits of Marcus, and also reveals the affection in which both his royal pupils held their tutor.

2. The emperor's secretary.

3. Cinna Catulus was another of the professors who gave lectures in philosophy.

4. Marcus had no brother. The word may be a playful allusion to Claudius Severus (whose son married one of Marcus's daughters), since Marcus also had originally been called Severus, though he later discarded the name. More probably the text is corrupt. Many editors prefer to read Verus, that is the Lucius Verus who, like Marcus himself, had been adopted by the emperor Antoninus Pius as his son; but the flattering picture drawn here by no means corresponds with what is known of the character of Verus (see note 1 on p. 42).

love the truth, and to love justice. Through him I came to know of Thrasea, Cato, Helvidius, Dion, and Brutus, and became acquainted with the conception of a community based on equality and freedom of speech for all, and a monarchy concerned primarily to uphold the liberty of the subject. He showed me the need for a fair and dispassionate appreciation of philosophy, an addiction to good works, open-handedness, a sanguine temper, and confidence in the affection of my friends. I remember, too, his forthrightness with those who came under his censure, and his way of leaving his friends in no doubt of his likes and dislikes, but of telling them plainly.

15. Maximus [1] was my model for self-control, fixity of purpose, and cheerfulness under ill-health or other misfortunes. His character was an admirable combination of dignity and charm, and all the duties of his station were performed quietly and without fuss. He gave everyone the conviction that he spoke as he believed, and acted as he judged right. Bewilderment or timidity were unknown to him; he was never hasty, never dilatory; nothing found him at a loss. He indulged neither in despondency nor forced gaiety, nor had anger or jealousy any power over him. Kindliness, sympathy, and sincerity all contributed to give the impression of a rectitude that was innate rather than inculcated. Nobody was ever made by him to feel inferior, yet none could have presumed to challenge his pre-eminence. He was also the possessor of an agreeable sense of humour.

16. The qualities I admired in my father [2] were his lenience,

1. Claudius Maximus, a Stoic philosopher especially admired by Marcus. His courage in sickness is appreciatively recalled (I, 16) and his death and that of his wife Secunda remembered with regret (VIII, 25).

2. Not his natural father Annius Verus, but the emperor Antoninus Pius, his adoptive father.

his firm refusal to be diverted from any decision he had deliberately reached, his complete indifference to meretricious honours; his industry, perseverance, and willingness to listen to any project for the common good; the unvarying insistence that rewards must depend on merit; the expert's sense of when to tighten the reins and when to relax them; and the efforts he made to suppress pederasty.

He was aware that social life must have its claims: his friends were under no obligation to join him at his table or attend his progresses, and when they were detained by other engagements it made no difference to him. Every question that came before him in council was painstakingly and patiently examined; he was never content to dismiss it on a cursory first impression. His friendships were enduring; they were not capricious, and they were not extravagant. He was always equal to an occasion; cheerful, yet long-sighted enough to have all his dispositions unobtrusively perfected down to the last detail. He had an ever-watchful eye to the needs of the Empire, prudently conserving its resources and putting up with the criticisms that resulted. Before his gods he was not superstitious; before his fellow-men he never stooped to bid for popularity or woo the masses, but pursued his own calm and steady way, disdaining anything that savoured of the flashy or new-fangled. He accepted without either complacency or compunction such material comforts as fortune had put at his disposal; when they were to hand he would avail himself of them frankly, but when they were not he had no regrets.

Not a vestige of the casuist's quibbling, the lackey's pertness, the pedant's over-scrupulosity could be charged against him; all men recognized in him a mature and finished personality, that was impervious to flattery and entirely capable of ruling both himself and others. Moreover, he had a high

respect for all genuine philosophers; and though refraining from criticism of the rest, he preferred to dispense with their guidance. In society he was affable and gracious without being fulsome. The care he took of his body was reasonable; there was no solicitous anxiety to prolong its existence, or to embellish its appearance, yet he was far from unmindful of it, and indeed looked after himself so successfully that he was seldom in need of medical attention or physic or liniments. No hint of jealousy showed in his prompt recognition of outstanding abilities, whether in public speaking, law, ethics, or any other department, and he took pains to give each man the chance of earning a reputation in his own field. Though all his actions were guided by a respect for constitutional precedent, he would never go out of his way to court public recognition of this. Again, he disliked restlessness and change, and had a rooted preference for the same places and the same pursuits. After one of his acute spasms of migraine he would lose no time in taking up his normal duties again, with new vigour and complete command of his powers. His secret and confidential files were not numerous, and the few infrequent items in them referred exclusively to matters of state. He showed good sense and restraint over the exhibition of spectacles, construction of public buildings, distribution of subsidies, and so forth, having always more in view the necessity for the measures themselves than the plaudits they evoked. His baths were not taken at inconvenient hours; he had no mania for building; he was quite uncritical of the food he ate, of the cut and colour of the garments he wore, or of the personableness of those around him. His clothes were sent up from his country seat at Lorium, and most of his things came from Lanuvium. His well-known treatment of the apologetic overseer at Tusculum was typical of his whole behaviour, for discourtesy was as foreign to his nature as

harshness or bluster; he never grew heated, as the saying is, to sweating-point; it was his habit to analyse and weigh every incident, taking his time about it, calmly, methodically, decisively, and consistently. What is recorded of Socrates was no less applicable to him, that he had the ability to allow or deny himself indulgences which most people are as much incapacitated by their weakness from refusing as by their excesses from appreciating. To be thus strong enough to refrain or consent at will argues a consummate and indomitable soul – as Maximus also demonstrated on his sick-bed.

17. To the gods I owe good grandparents, good parents, a good sister, and teachers, comrades, kinsmen, and friends good almost without exception; and that I never fell out with any of them, in spite of a temperament that could very well have precipitated something of the sort, had not circumstances providentially never combined to put me to the proof. To them, too, I owe it that the responsibility of my grandfather's mistress for my upbringing was brought to an early end, and my innocence preserved; and that I was not impatient to reach manhood, but contented myself with an unhurried development. I thank heaven also that under my father the Emperor I was cured of all pomposity, and made to realize that life at court can be lived without royal escorts, robes of state, illuminations, statues, and outward splendour of that kind, but that one's manner of life can be reduced almost to the level of a private gentleman's without losing the prestige and authority needful when affairs of state require leadership. The gods, too, gave me a brother[1] whose natural

1. This was Lucius Ceionius Commodus, afterwards known as Lucius Verus. He was adopted by Antoninus Pius along with Marcus, with whom he was associated as co-emperor and whose daughter Lucilla he married. Originally a man of courage and ability, Verus degenerated into weakness and self-indulgence. As commander of the Roman armies in the Parthian war he proved indolent and incapable, and was only saved from disgrace by the skill of his generals. When he returned with his legions from the East, they carried back the seeds of a pestilence which spread with terrible effect throughout the Empire. Verus died in 169 – as some said, by the hand of a poisoner.

qualities were a standing challenge to my own self-discipline at the same time as his deferential affection warmed my heart; and children who were neither intellectually stunted nor physically misshapen. It was the gods who set a limit to my proficiency in rhetoric, poetry, and other studies that might well have absorbed my time, had I found it less difficult to make progress. They saw to it that at the first opportunity I raised my tutors to such rank and station as I thought they had at heart, instead of putting them off with prospects of later advancement on the plea of their youth. To the gods I owe my acquaintance with Apollonius, Rusticus, and Maximus. To them, too, my vivid and recurrent visions of the true inwardness of the Natural Life; indeed, for their part, the favours, helps, and inspirations I have received leave my failure to attain this Natural Life without excuse; and if I am still far from the goal, the fault is my own for not paying heed to the reminders – nay, the virtual directions – which I have had from above.

To the gods it must be ascribed that my constitution has survived this manner of life so long; that I never got entangled with a Benedicta nor a Theodotus, and also emerged from other subsequent affairs unscathed; that although Rusticus and I frequently had our differences, I never pushed things to a point I might have regretted; and that the last years of my mother's life, before her early death, were spent with me. Futhermore, that on occasions when I thought of relieving somebody in poverty or distress, I was never told that I had not the necessary means; as also that I myself never had

occasion to require similar help from another. And I must thank heaven for such a wife as mine, so submissive, so loving, and so artless; for an unfailing supply of competent tutors for my children; and for remedies prescribed for me in dreams – especially in cases of blood-spitting and vertigo, as happened at Caieta and Chrysa. Finally, that with all my addiction to philosophy I was yet preserved from either falling a prey to some sophist or spending all my time at a desk poring over textbooks and rules of logic or grinding at natural science.

For all these good things 'man needs the help of Heaven and Destiny'.*

Among the Quadi, on the River Gran.

* Apparently a quotation, the source of which has not been traced.

BOOK TWO

1. Begin each day by telling yourself: Today I shall be meeting with interference, ingratitude, insolence, disloyalty, ill-will, and selfishness – all of them due to the offenders' ignorance of what is good or evil. But for my part I have long perceived the nature of good and its nobility, the nature of evil and its meanness, and also the nature of the culprit himself, who is my brother (not in the physical sense, but as a fellow-creature similarly endowed with reason and a share of the divine); therefore none of those things can injure me, for nobody can implicate me in what is degrading. Neither can I be angry with my brother or fall foul of him; for he and I were born to work together, like a man's two hands, feet, or eyelids, or like the upper and lower rows of his teeth. To obstruct each other is against Nature's law – and what is irritation or aversion but a form of obstruction?

2. A little flesh, a little breath, and a Reason to rule all – that is myself. (Forget your books; no more hankering for them; they were no part of your equipment.) As one already on the threshold of death, think nothing of the first – of its viscid blood, its bones, its web of nerves and veins and arteries. The breath, too; what is that? A whiff of wind; and not even the same wind, but every moment puffed out and drawn in anew. But the third, the Reason, the master – on this you must concentrate. Now that your hairs are grey, let it play the part of a slave no more, twitching puppetwise at every pull of self-interest; and cease to fume at destiny by ever grumbling at today or lamenting over tomorrow.

3. The whole divine economy is pervaded by Providence.

Even the vagaries of chance have their place in Nature's scheme; that is, in the intricate tapestry of the ordinances of Providence. Providence is the source from which all things flow; and allied with it is Necessity, and the welfare of the universe. You yourself are a part of that universe; and for any one of nature's parts, that which is assigned to it by the World-Nature or helps to keep it in being is good. Moreover, what keeps the whole world in being is Change: not merely change of the basic elements, but also change of the larger formations they compose. On these thoughts rest content, and ever hold them as principles. Forget your thirst for books; so that when your end comes you may not murmur, but meet it with a good grace and with unfeigned gratitude in your heart to the gods.

4. Think of your many years of procrastination; how the gods have repeatedly granted you further periods of grace, of which you have taken no advantage. It is time now to realize the nature of the universe to which you belong, and of that controlling Power whose offspring you are; and to understand that your time has a limit set to it. Use it, then, to advance your enlightenment; or it will be gone, and never in your power again.

5. Hour by hour resolve firmly, like a Roman and a man, to do what comes to hand with correct and natural dignity, and with humanity, independence, and justice. Allow your mind freedom from all other considerations. This you can do, if you will approach each action as though it were your last, dismissing the wayward thought, the emotional recoil from the commands of reason, the desire to create an impression, the admiration of self, the discontent with your lot. See how little a man needs to master, for his days to flow on in quiet-

ness and piety: he has but to observe these few counsels, and the gods will ask nothing more.

6. Wrong, wrong thou art doing to thyself, O my soul; and all too soon thou shalt have no more time to do thyself right. Man has but one life; already thine is nearing its close, yet still hast thou no eye to thine own honour, but art staking thy happiness on the souls of other men.[1]

7. Are you distracted by outward cares? Then allow yourself a space of quiet, wherein you can add to your knowledge of the Good and learn to curb your restlessness. Guard also against another kind of error: the folly of those who weary their days in much business, but lack any aim on which their whole effort, nay, their whole thought, is focussed.

8. You will not easily find a man coming to grief through indifference to the workings of another's soul; but for those who pay no heed to the motions of their own, unhappiness is their sure reward.

9. Remembering always what the World-Nature is, and what my own nature is, and how the one stands in respect to the other – so small a fraction of so vast a Whole – bear in mind that no man can hinder you from conforming each word and deed to that Nature of which you are a part.

10. When Theophrastus is comparing sins – so far as they are commonly acknowledged to be comparable – he affirms the philosophic truth that sins of desire are more culpable than sins of passion. For passion's revulsion from reason at least seems to bring with it a certain discomfort, and a half-felt sense of constraint; whereas sins of desire, in which pleasure predominates, indicate a more self-indulgent and

1. That is, on whether others decide to approve or censure your actions.

womanish disposition. Both experience and philosophy, then, support the contention that a sin which is pleasurable deserves graver censure than one which is painful. In the one case the offender is like a man stung into an involuntary loss of control by some injustice; in the other, eagerness to gratify his desire moves him to do wrong of his own volition.

11. In all you do or say or think, recollect that at any time the power of withdrawal from life is in your own hands. If gods exist, you have nothing to fear in taking leave of mankind, for they will not let you come to harm. But if there are no gods, or if they have no concern with mortal affairs, what is life to me, in a world devoid of gods or devoid of Providence? Gods, however, do exist, and do concern themselves with the world of men. They have given us full power not to fall into any of the absolute evils; and if there were real evil in life's other experiences, they would have provided for that too, so that avoidance of it could lie within every man's ability. But when a thing does not worsen the man himself, how can it worsen the life he lives? The World-Nature cannot have been so ignorant as to overlook a hazard of this kind, nor, if aware of it, have been unable to devise a safeguard or a remedy. Neither want of power nor want of skill could have led Nature into the error of allowing good and evil to be visited indiscriminately on the virtuous and the sinful alike. Yet living and dying, honour and dishonour, pain and pleasure, riches and poverty, and so forth are equally the lot of good men and bad. Things like these neither elevate nor degrade; and therefore they are no more good than they are evil.

12. Our mental powers should enable us to perceive the swiftness with which all things vanish away: their bodies in the world of space, and their remembrance in the world

of time. We should also observe the nature of all objects of sense – particularly such as allure us with pleasure, or affright us with pain, or are clamorously urged upon us by the voice of self-conceit – the cheapness and contemptibility of them, how sordid they are, and how quickly fading and dead. We should discern the true worth of those whose word and opinion confer reputations. We should apprehend, too, the nature of death; and that if only it be steadily contemplated, and the fancies we associate with it be mentally dissected, it will soon come to be thought of as no more than a process of nature (and only children are scared by a natural process) – or rather, something more than a mere process, a positive contribution to nature's well-being. Also we can learn how man has contact with God, and with which part of himself this is maintained, and how that part fares after its removal hence.

13. Nothing is more melancholy than to compass the whole creation, 'probing into the deeps of earth', as the poet says, and peering curiously into the secrets of others' souls, without once understanding that to hold fast to the divine spirit within, and serve it loyally, is all that is needful. Such service involves keeping it pure from passion, and from aimlessness, and from discontent with the works of gods or men; for the former of these works deserve our reverence, for their excellence; the latter our goodwill, for fraternity's sake, and at times perhaps our pity too, because of men's ignorance of good and evil – an infirmity as crippling as the inability to distinguish black from white.

14. Were you to live three thousand years, or even thirty thousand, remember that the sole life which a man can lose is that which he is living at the moment; and furthermore, that he can have no other life except the one he loses. This

means that the longest life and the shortest amount to the same thing. For the passing minute is every man's equal possession, but what has once gone by is not ours. Our loss, therefore, is limited to that one fleeting instant, since no one can lose what is already past, nor yet what is still to come – for how can he be deprived of what he does not possess? So two things should be borne in mind. First, that all the cycles of creation since the beginning of time exhibit the same recurring pattern, so that it can make no difference whether you watch the identical spectacle for a hundred years, or for two hundred, or for ever. Secondly, that when the longest- and the shortest-lived of us come to die, their loss is precisely equal. For the sole thing of which any man can be deprived is the present; since this is all he owns, and nobody can lose what is not his.

15. There are obvious objections to the Cynic Monimus's statement that 'things are determined by the view taken of them'; but the value of his aphorism is equally obvious, if we admit the substance of it so far as it contains a truth.

16. For a human soul, the greatest of self-inflicted wrongs is to make itself (so far as it is able to do so) a kind of tumour or abscess on the universe; for to quarrel with circumstances is always a rebellion against Nature – and Nature includes the nature of each individual part. Another wrong, again, is to reject a fellow-creature or oppose him with malicious intent, as men do when they are angry. A third, to surrender to pleasure or pain. A fourth, to dissemble and show insincerity or falsity in word or deed. A fifth, for the soul to direct its acts and endeavours to no particular object, and waste its energies purposelessly and without due thought; for even the least of our activities ought to have some end in view – and for

creatures with reason, that end is conformity with the reason and law of the primordial City and Commonwealth.

17. In the life of a man, his time is but a moment, his being an incessant flux, his senses a dim rushlight, his body a prey of worms, his soul an unquiet eddy, his fortune dark, and his fame doubtful. In short, all that is of the body is as coursing waters, all that is of the soul as dreams and vapours; life a warfare, a brief sojourning in an alien land; and after repute, oblivion. Where, then, can man find the power to guide and guard his steps? In one thing and one alone: Philosophy. To be a philosopher is to keep unsullied and unscathed the divine spirit within him, so that it may transcend all pleasure and all pain, take nothing in hand without purpose and nothing falsely or with dissimulation, depend not on another's actions or inactions, accept each and every dispensation as coming from the same Source as itself – and last and chief, wait with a good grace for death, as no more than a simple dissolving of the elements whereof each living thing is composed. If those elements themselves take no harm from their ceaseless forming and re-forming, why look with mistrust upon the change and dissolution of the whole? It is but Nature's way; and in the ways of Nature there is no evil to be found.

that, what more is Nestor with all his years than any three-days babe?

51. Ever run the short way, and the short way is the way of nature, with perfect soundness in each word and deed as the goal. Such an aim will give you freedom from anxiety and strife, and from all compromise and artifice.

BOOK FIVE

1. At day's first light have in readiness, against disinclination to leave your bed, the thought that 'I am rising for the work of man'. Must I grumble at setting out to do what I was born for, and for the sake of which I have been brought into the world? Is this the purpose of my creation, to lie here under the blankets and keep myself warm? 'Ah, but it is a great deal more pleasant!' Was it for pleasure, then, that you were born, and not for work, not for effort? Look at the plants, the sparrows, ants, spiders, bees, all busy at their own tasks, each doing his part towards a coherent world-order; and will you refuse man's share of the work, instead of being prompt to carry out Nature's bidding? 'Yes, but one must have some repose as well.' Granted; but repose has its limits set by nature, in the same way as food and drink have; and you overstep these limits, you go beyond the point of sufficiency; while on the other hand, when action is in question, you stop short of what you could well achieve.

You have no real love for yourself; if you had, you would love your nature, and your nature's will. Craftsmen who love their trade will spend themselves to the utmost in labouring at it, even going unwashed and unfed; but you hold your nature in less regard than the engraver does his engraving, the dancer his dancing, the miser his heap of silver, or the vainglorious man his moment of glory. These men, when their heart is in it, are ready to sacrifice food and sleep to the advancement of their chosen pursuit. Is the service of the community of less worth in your eyes, and does it merit less devotion?

2. O the consolation of being able to thrust aside and cast into oblivion every tiresome intrusive impression, and in a trice be utterly at peace!

3. Reserve your right to any deed or utterance that accords with nature. Do not be put off by the criticisms or comments that may follow; if there is something good to be done or said, never renounce your right to it. Those who criticize you have their own reason to guide them, and their own impulse to prompt them; you must not let your eyes stray towards them, but keep a straight course and follow your own nature and the World-Nature (and the way of these two is one).

4. I travel the roads of nature until the hour when I shall lie down and be at rest; yielding back my last breath into the air from which I have drawn it daily, and sinking down upon the earth from which my father derived the seed, my mother the blood, and my nurse the milk of my being – the earth which for so many years has furnished my daily meat and drink, and, though so grievously abused, still suffers me to tread its surface.

5. You will never be remarkable for quick-wittedness. Be it so, then; yet there are still a host of other qualities whereof you cannot say, 'I have no bent for them.' Cultivate these, then, for they are wholly within your power: sincerity, for example, and dignity; industriousness, and sobriety. Avoid grumbling; be frugal, considerate, and frank; be temperate in manner and in speech; carry yourself with authority. See how many qualities there are which could be yours at this moment. You can allege no native incapacity or inaptitude for them; and yet you choose to linger still on a less lofty plane. Furthermore, is it any lack of natural endowments that necessitates those fits of querulousness and parsimony and fulsome flattery, of railing at your ill-health, of cringing and bragging

and continually veering from one mood to another? Most assuredly not; you could have rid yourself of all these long ago, and remained chargeable with nothing worse than a certain slowness and dulness of comprehension – and even this you can correct with practice, so long as you do not make light of it or take pleasure in your own obtuseness.

6. There is a type of person who, if he renders you a service, has no hesitation in claiming the credit for it. Another, though not prepared to go so far as that, will nevertheless secretly regard you as in his debt and be fully conscious of what he has done. But there is also the man who, one might almost say, has no consciousness at all of what he has done, like the vine which produces a cluster of grapes and then, having yielded its rightful fruit, looks for no more thanks than a horse that has run his race, a hound that has tracked his quarry, or a bee that has hived her honey. Like them, the man who has done one good action does not cry it aloud, but passes straight on to a second, as the vine passes on to the bearing of another summer's grapes.

'According to you, then, we should rank ourselves with things that act unconsciously?' Exactly; yet we should do so consciously; for, as the saying goes, 'awareness that his actions are social is the mark of a social being'. 'But also, surely, the wish that society itself should be equally aware of it?' True, no doubt; yet you miss the meaning of the aphorism, and so put yourself in the same class as the persons I have just described, who likewise are misled by a specious kind of reasoning. Apprehend the true significance of the saying, and you need never fear that it will betray you into omitting any social duty.

7. The Athenians pray, 'Rain, rain, dear Zeus, upon the fields

and plains of Athens.' Prayers should either not be offered at all, or else be as simple and ingenuous as this.

8. Just as we say, 'Aesculapius[1] has prescribed horseback exercise, or cold baths, or going barefoot,' so in the same way does the World-Nature prescribe disease, mutilation, loss, or some other disability. In the former case, prescribing meant ordering a specific treatment, in the interests of the patient's health; similarly in the latter, certain specific occurrences are ordered, in the interests of our destiny. We may, in fact, be said to 'meet with' these misfortunes in the same sense as masons say that the squared stones in walls or pyramids 'meet with' each other when they are being fitted closely together to make the unified whole. This mutual integration is a universal principle. As a myriad bodies combine into the single Body which is the world, so a myriad causes combine into the single Cause which is destiny. Even the common people realize this when they say, 'It was brought upon him.' It was indeed brought upon him; that is, it was prescribed for him. Let us accept such things, then, as we accept the prescriptions of an Aesculapius; for they, too, have often a harsh flavour, yet we swallow them gladly in hope of health. The execution and fulfilment of Nature's decrees should be viewed in the same way as we view our bodily health: even if what

1. By Aesculapius, Marcus here means any medical consultant. The original Aesculapius is mentioned by Homer merely as 'an excellent leech' who was the father of Machaon and Podalirius, the two physicians of the Greek army at Troy. In later times he appears with the rank of a divinity, presiding over the arts of healing and worshipped in his temples all over Greece. Serpents were everywhere associated with the cult of Aesculapius (the snake's periodic shedding of its skin causing it to be regarded as an apt symbol of renewed health and vigour); and the god's emblem of a serpent-wreathed staff was frequently placed by physicians at the head of their prescriptions. It is familiar today as the badge of the Royal Army Medical Corps.

befalls is unpalatable, nevertheless always receive it gladly, for it makes for the health of the universe, and even for the well-being and well-doing of Zeus himself. Had it not been for the benefit of the whole, he would never have brought it upon the individual. It is not Nature's way to bring anything upon that which is under her government, except what is specifically designed for its good. There are two reasons, then, why you should willingly accept what happens to you: first, because it happens to yourself, has been prescribed for yourself, and concerns yourself, being a strand in the tapestry of primordial causation; and secondly, because every individual dispensation is one of the causes of the prosperity, success, and even survival of That which administers the universe. To break off any particle, no matter how small, from the continuous concatenation – whether of causes or of any other elements – is to injure the whole. And each time you give way to discontent, you are causing, within your own limited ability, just such a breakage and disruption.

9. Do not be distressed, do not despond or give up in despair, if now and again practice falls short of precept. Return to the attack after each failure, and be thankful if on the whole you can acquit yourself in the majority of cases as a man should. But have a genuine liking for the discipline you return to: do not recur to your philosophy in the spirit of a schoolboy to his master, but as the sore-eyed recur to their egg-and-sponge lotion, or as others to their poultice or their douche. In this way your submission to reason will not become a matter for public display, but for private consolation. Bear in mind that, while philosophy wills only what your own nature wills, you yourself were willing something else that was at variance with nature. 'Yes, but what other thing could have been more agreeable?' – is not that the inducement wherewith

pleasure seeks to beguile you? Yet consider: would not nobility of soul be more agreeable? Would not candour, simplicity, kindness, piety? Nay more; when you reflect on the precision and smoothness with which the processes of ratiocination and cognition operate, can there be anything more agreeable than the exercise of intellect?

10. As for truth, it is so veiled in obscurity that many reputable philosophers [1] assert the impossibility of reaching any certain knowledge. Even the Stoics admit that its attainment is beset with difficulties, and that all our intellectual conclusions are fallible; for where is the infallible man? Or turn from this to more material things: how transitory, how worthless are these – open to acquisition by every profligate, loose woman, and criminal. Or look at the characters of your own associates: even the most agreeable of them are difficult to put up with; and for the matter of that, it is difficult enough to put up with one's own self. In all this murk and mire, then, in all this ceaseless flow of being and time, of changes imposed and changes endured, I can think of nothing that is worth prizing highly or pursuing seriously. No; what a man must do is to nerve himself to wait quietly for his natural dissolution; and meanwhile not to chafe at its delay, but to find his sole consolation in two thoughts: first, that nothing can ever happen to us that is not in accordance with nature; and second, that power to abstain from acting against the divine spirit within me lies in my own hands, since there is no man alive who can force such disobedience upon me.

1. The reference is to the so-called 'Sceptic' or Pyrrhonian school of philosophers, founded by Pyrrho of Elis. They maintained that our perceptions can only show us things as they appear, and not as they are, and that a suspension of judgement is therefore the only correct attitude to anything.

11. To what use am I now putting the powers of my soul? Examine yourself on this point at every step, and ask, 'How stands it with that part of me men call the master-part? Whose soul inhabits me at this moment? A child's, a lad's, a woman's, a tyrant's, a dumb ox's, or a wild beast's?'

12. The popular conception of 'goods' can be tested in this way.[1] If the things a man identifies in his own mind with 'goods' are such things as prudence, temperance, justice, and fortitude, then, given that preconception, he will have no ears for the old jest about 'so many goods', for it will lack any point. On the other hand, if he shares the vulgar notion of what constitutes 'goods', he will readily appreciate the joker's quip, and have no difficulty in seeing its aptness. The majority do, in fact, entertain this idea of values, and they would never take offence at the witticism or refuse to hear it; indeed, we must accept it as an apt and clever observation if we take it to refer to wealth or things which conduce to luxury or prestige. So now for the test: ask yourself whether we do right to set store by things and think of them as 'goods', if our mental picture of them is such as to give meaning to the gibe that 'the owner of so many goods has no room left to ease himself'.

13. I consist of a formal element and a material. Neither of these can ever pass away into nothing, any more than either of them came into being from nothing. Consequently every part of me will one day be re-fashioned, by a process of transition,

1. This paragraph turns on the ambiguous meaning of the word 'goods'. The man in the street understands it to signify worldly possessions, rather than those virtues of character which are the true 'goods' in life. To a philosopher, on the other hand, the word would naturally convey this latter sense; and he would accordingly be puzzled by a reference to someone 'having so many goods that he has no room to relieve himself anywhere'.

into some other portion of the universe; which in its turn will again be changed into yet another part, and so onward to infinity. It is the same process by which I myself was brought into existence, and my parents before me, and so backward once more to infinity. (The phrase 'infinity' may pass, even if the world be in fact administered in finite cycles.)

14. Reason, and the act of reasoning, are self-sufficient faculties, both inherently and in the method of their operation. It is from sources in themselves that they acquire their initial impetus; and they travel straight forward to their own self-appointed goals. Actions of this kind accordingly receive the name of 'straightforwardness', in reference to the undeviating line they follow.

15. Unless things pertain to a man, as man, they cannot properly be said to belong to him. They cannot be required of him; for his nature neither promises them, nor is perfected by them. Therefore they cannot represent his chief end in life, nor even the 'good' which is the means to that end. Moreover, had man's natural heritage included such things, it could not at the same time have included contempt and renunciation of them; nor would the ability to do without them have been any cause for commendation; nor, supposing them to be really good, would failure to claim a full share of them be compatible with goodness. As it is, however, the more a man deprives himself, or submits to be deprived, of such things and their like, the more he grows in goodness.

16. Your mind will be like its habitual thoughts; for the soul becomes dyed with the colour of its thoughts. Soak it then in such trains of thought as, for example: Where life is possible at all, a right life is possible; life in a palace is possible; there-

fore even in a palace a right life is possible.[1] Or again: The purpose behind each thing's creation determines its development; the development points to its final state; the final state gives the clue to its chief advantage and good; therefore the chief good of a rational being is fellowship with his neighbours – for it has been made clear long ago that fellowship is the purpose behind our creation. (It is surely evident, is it not, that while the lower exist for the higher, the higher exist for one another? And while the animate is higher than the inanimate, the rational is higher still.)

17. To pursue the unattainable is insanity, yet the thoughtless can never refrain from doing so.

18. Nothing can happen to any man that nature has not fitted him to endure. Your neighbour's experiences are no different from your own; yet he, being either less aware of what has happened or more eager to show his mettle, stands steady and undaunted. For shame, that ignorance and vanity should prove stronger than wisdom!

19. Outward things can touch the soul not a whit; they know no way into it, they have no power to sway or move it. By itself it sways and moves itself; it has its own self-approved standards of judgement, and to them it refers every experience.

20. In one way humanity touches me very nearly, inasmuch as I am bound to do good to my fellow-creatures and bear with them. On the other hand, to the extent that individual men hamper my proper activities, humanity becomes a thing as indifferent to me as the sun, the wind, or the creatures of

1. Matthew Arnold found in these words the inspiration for his sonnet beginning, ' "Even in a palace life may be lived well"; So spake the imperial sage, purest of men, Marcus Aurelius.'

the wild. True, others may hinder the carrying out of certain actions; but they cannot obstruct my will, nor the disposition of my mind, since these will always safeguard themselves under reservations and adapt themselves to circumstances. The mind can circumvent all obstacles to action, and turn them to the furtherance of its main purpose, so that any impediment to its work becomes instead an auxiliary, and the barriers in its path become aids to progress.

21. In the universe, reverence that which is highest: namely, That to which all else ministers, and which gives the law to all. In like manner, too, reverence the highest in yourself: it is of one piece with the Other, since in yourself also it is that to which all the rest minister, and by which your life is directed.

22. What is not harmful to the city cannot harm the citizen. In every fancied case of harm, apply the rule, 'If the city is not harmed, I am not harmed either.' But if the city should indeed be harmed, never rage at the culprit: rather, find out at what point his vision failed him.

23. Reflect often upon the rapidity with which all existing things, or things coming into existence, sweep past us and are carried away. The great river of Being flows on without a pause; its actions for ever changing, its causes shifting endlessly, hardly a single thing standing still; while ever at hand looms infinity stretching behind and before – the abyss in which all things are lost to sight. In such conditions, surely a man were foolish to gasp and fume and fret, as though the time of his troubling could ever be of long continuance.

24. Think of the totality of all Being, and what a mite of it is yours; think of all Time, and the brief fleeting instant of it that is allotted to yourself; think of Destiny, and how puny a part of it you are.

25. Is one doing me wrong? Let himself look to that; his humours and his actions are his own. As for me, I am only receiving what the World-Nature wills me to receive, and acting as my own nature wills me to act.

26. Let no emotions of the flesh, be they of pain or pleasure, affect the supreme and sovereign portion of the soul. See that it never becomes involved with them: it must limit itself to its own domain, and keep the feelings confined to their proper sphere. If (through the sympathy which permeates any unified organism) they do spread to the mind, there need be no attempt to resist the physical sensation; only, the master-reason must refrain from adding its own assumptions of their goodness or badness.

27. Live with the gods. To live with the gods is to show them at all times a soul contented with their awards, and wholly fulfilling the will of that inward divinity, that particle of himself, which Zeus has given to every man for ruler and guide – the mind and the reason.

28. Do unsavoury armpits and bad breath make you angry? What good will it do you? Given the mouth and armpits the man has got, that condition is bound to produce those odours. 'After all, though, the fellow is endowed with reason, and he is perfectly able to understand what is offensive if he gives any thought to it.' Well and good: but you yourself are also endowed with reason; so apply your reasonableness to move him to a like reasonableness; expound, admonish. If he pays attention, you will have worked a cure, and there will be no need for passion; leave that to actors and streetwalkers.

29. It is possible to live on earth as you mean to live hereafter. But if men will not let you, then quit the house of life; though not with any feeling of ill-usage. 'The hut smokes; I

move out.' No need to make a great business of it. Nevertheless, so long as nothing of the kind obliges me to depart, here I remain, my own master, and none shall hinder me from doing what I choose – and what I choose is to live the life that nature enjoins for a reasonable member of a social community.

30. The Mind of the universe is social. At all events, it has created the lower forms to serve the higher, and then linked together the higher in a mutual dependence on each other. Observe how some are subjected, others are connected, each and all are given their just due, and the more eminent among them are combined in mutual accord.

31. How have you behaved in the past to the gods, to your parents, your brothers, wife, children, teachers, tutors, friends, relatives, household? In all of these relationships, up to the present time, can you fairly echo the poet's line, 'Never a harsh word, never an injustice to a single person?' * Call to mind all you have passed through, and all you have been enabled to endure. Reflect that the story of your life is over, and your service at an end; bethink you of all the fair sights you have seen, the pleasures and the pains you have spurned, the many honours disdained, the many considerations shown to the inconsiderate.

32. How comes it that souls of no proficiency nor learning are able to confound the adept and the sage? Ah, but what soul is truly both adept and sage? His alone, who has knowledge of the beginning and the end, and of that all-pervading Reason which orders the universe in its determinate cycles to the end of time.

33. In a brief while now you will be ashes or bare bones; a

* Homer, *Odyssey*, iv, 690.

name, or perhaps not even a name – though even a name is no more than empty sound and reiteration. All that men set their hearts on in this life is vanity, corruption, and trash; men are like scuffling puppies, or quarrelsome children who are all smiles one moment and in tears the next. Faith and decency, justice and truth are fled 'up to Olympus from the wide-wayed earth'.* What is it, then, that still keeps you here? The objects of sense are mutable and transient, the organs of sense dim and easily misled, the poor soul itself a mere vapour exhaled from the blood,[1] and the world's praise, in such conditions, a vain thing. What then? Take heart, and wait for the end, be it extinction or translation. And what, think you, is all that is needful until that hour come? Why, what else but to revere and bless the gods; to do good to men; to bear and forbear; and to remember that whatsoever lies outside the bounds of this poor flesh and breath is none of yours, nor in your power.

34. Press on steadily, keep to the straight road in your thinking and doing, and your days will ever flow on smoothly. The soul of man, like the souls of all rational creatures, has two things in common with the soul of God: it can never be thwarted from without, and its good consists in righteousness of character and action, and in confining every wish thereto.

35. If the thing be no sin of mine, nor caused by any sin of mine, and if society be no worse for it, why give it further thought? How can it harm society?

36. Do not fall a too hasty prey to first impressions. Assist those in need, so far as you are able and they deserve it; but if their fall involves nothing morally significant, you must

1. According to the Stoic belief, the particle of divine fire which constitutes man's soul is nourished by the blood.

* Hesiod, *Works and Days*, v, 197.

not regard them as really injured, for that is not a good practice. Rather, in such cases be like the old fellow who pretended at his departure to beg eagerly for the slave-girl's top,[1] though knowing well that it was nothing more than a top.

When you are crying for votes on the platform, my friend, are you forgetting the ultimate worth of it all? 'I know; but these people set such store by it.' And does that justify you in sharing their folly?

No matter to what solitudes banished, I have always been a favourite of Fortune. For Fortune's favourite is the man who awards her good gifts to himself – the good gifts of a good disposition, good impulses, and good deeds.

1. The 'old fellow' made a kindly pretence of sharing the child's notion that its top was a precious and desirable treasure. In the same way, says Marcus, we should be sympathetic to the distress of others, even when our superior knowledge tells us that they have suffered no real harm.

BOOK SIX

1. Matter in the universe is supple and compliant, and the Reason which controls it has no motive for ill-doing; for it is without malice, and does nothing with intent to injure, neither is anything harmed by it. By its ordinances all things have their birth and their fulfilment.

2. If you are doing what is right, never mind whether you are freezing with cold or beside a good fire; heavy-eyed, or fresh from a sound sleep; reviled or applauded; in the act of dying, or about some other piece of business. (For even dying is part of the business of life; and there too no more is required of us than 'to see the moment's work well done'.)

3. Look beneath the surface: never let a thing's intrinsic quality or worth escape you.

4. All material objects swiftly change: either by sublimation (if the substance of the universe be indeed a unity), or else by dispersion.

5. Reason, the controller, has a perfect understanding of the conditions, the purpose, and the materials of its work.

6. To refrain from imitation is the best revenge.

7. Let your one delight and refreshment be to pass from one service to the community to another, with God ever in mind.

8. Our master-reason is something which is both self-awakened and self-directed. It cannot only make itself what it will, but also impose the aspect of its choice on anything which it experiences.

BOOK NINE

1. Injustice is a sin. Nature has constituted rational beings for their own mutual benefit, each to help his fellows according to their worth, and in no wise to do them hurt; and to contravene her will is plainly to sin against this eldest of all the deities. Untruthfulness, too, is a sin, and against the same goddess. For Nature is the nature of Existence itself; and existence connotes the kinship of all created beings. Truth is but another name for this Nature, the original creator of all true things. So, where a wilful lie is a sin because the deception is an act of injustice, an involuntary lie is also a sin because it is a discordant note in Nature's harmony, and creates mutinous disorder in an orderly universe. For mutinous indeed it is, when a man lets himself be carried, even involuntarily, into a position contrary to truth; seeing that he has so neglected the faculties Nature gave him that he is no longer able to distinguish the false from the true.

Again, it is a sin to pursue pleasure as a good and to avoid pain as an evil. It is bound to result in complaints that Nature is unfair in her rewarding of vice and virtue; since it is the bad who are so often in enjoyment of pleasures and the means to obtain them, while pains and events that occasion pains descend upon the heads of the good. Besides, if a man is afraid of pain, he is afraid of something happening which will be part of the appointed order of things, and this is itself a sin; if he is bent on the pursuit of pleasure, he will not stop at acts of injustice, which again is manifestly sinful. No; when Nature herself makes no distinction – and if she did, she would not have brought pains and pleasures into existence side by side – it behoves those who would follow in her

footsteps to be like-minded and exhibit the same indifference. He therefore who does not view with equal unconcern pain or pleasure, death or life, fame or dishonour – all of them employed by Nature without any partiality – clearly commits a sin. And in saying that nature employs them without partiality, I mean that every successive generation of created things equally passes through the same experiences in turn; for this is the outcome of the original impulse which in the beginning moved Providence – by taking certain germs of future existences, and endowing them with productive powers of self-realization, of mutation, and of succession – to progress from the inception of the universe to its present orderly system.

2. A man of finer feelings would have taken leave of the world before ever sampling its falsehood, double-dealing, luxury, and pride; but now that all these have been tasted to satiety, the next best course would be to end your life forthwith. Or are you really resolved to go on dwelling in the midst of iniquity, and has experience not yet persuaded you to flee from the pestilence? For infection of the mind is a far more dangerous pestilence than any unwholesomeness or disorder in the atmosphere around us. Insofar as we are animals, the one attacks our lives; but as men, the other attacks our manhood.

3. Despise not death; smile, rather, at its coming; it is among the things that Nature wills. Like youth and age, like growth and maturity, like the advent of teeth, beard, and grey hairs, like begetting, pregnancy, and childbirth, like every other natural process that life's seasons bring us, so is our dissolution. Never, then, will a thinking man view death lightly, impatiently, or scornfully; he will wait for it as but one more of Nature's processes. Even as you await the baby's

emergence from the womb of your wife, so await the hour when the little soul shall glide forth from its sheath.

But if your heart would have comfort of a simpler sort, then there is no better solace in the face of death than to think on the nature of the surroundings you are leaving, and the characters you will no longer have to mix with. Not that you must find these offensive; rather, your duty is to care for them and bear with them mildly; yet never forget that you are parting from men of far other principles than your own. One thing, if any, might have held you back and bound you to life; the chance of fellowship with kindred minds. But when you contemplate the weariness of an existence in company so discordant, you cry, 'Come quickly, Death, lest I too become forgetful of myself.'

4. The sinner sins against himself; the wrongdoer wrongs himself, becoming the worse by his own action.

5. A man does not sin by commission only, but often by omission.

6. Enough if your present opinion be grounded in conviction, your present action grounded in unselfishness, and your present disposition contented with whatever befalls you from without.

7. Erase fancy; curb impulse; quench desire; let sovereign reason have the mastery.

8. A single life-principle is divided amongst all irrational creatures, and a single mind-principle distributed among the rational; just as this one earth gives form to all things earthy, and just as all of us who have sight and breath see by the self-same light and breathe of the self-same air.

9. All things that share the same element tend to seek their own kind. Things earthy gravitate towards earth, things aqueous flow towards one another, things aerial likewise – whence the need for the barriers which keep them forcibly apart. The tendency of flames is to mount skyward, because of the elemental fire; even here below, they are so eager for the company of their own kind that any sort of material, if it be reasonably dry, will ignite with ease, since there is only a minority of its ingredients which is resistant to fire. In the same way, therefore, all portions of the universal Mind are drawn towards one another. More strongly, indeed; since, being higher in the scale of creation, their eagerness to blend and combine with their affinities is proportionately keener. This instinct for reunion shows itself in its first stage among the creatures without reason, when we see bees swarming, cattle herding, birds nesting in colonies, and couples mating; because in them soul has already emerged, and in such relatively higher forms of life as theirs the desire for union is found at a level of intensity which is not present in stones or sticks. When we come to beings with reason, there are political associations, comradeships, family life, public meetings, and in times of war treaties and armistices; and among the still higher orders, a measure of unity even exists between bodies far separated from one another – as for example with the stars. Thus ascent in the ranks of creation can induce fellow-feeling even where there is no proximity.

Yet now see what happens. It is we – we, intelligent beings – who alone have forgotten this mutual zeal for unity; among us alone the currents are not seen to converge. Nevertheless, though man may flee as he will, he is still caught and held fast; Nature is too strong for him. Observe with care, and you will see: you will sooner find a fragment of

earth unrelated to the rest of earth than a man who is utterly without some link with his fellows.

10. Everything bears fruit; man, God, the whole universe, each in its proper season. No matter that the phrase is restricted in common use to vines and such like. Reason, too, yields fruit, both for itself and for the world; since from it comes a harvest of other good things, themselves all bearing the stamp of reason.

11. Teach them better, if you can; if not, remember that kindliness has been given you for moments like these. The gods themselves show kindness to such men; and at times, so indulgent are they, will even aid them in their endeavours to secure health, wealth, or reputation. This you too could do; who is there to hinder you?

12. Work yourself hard, but not as if you were being made a victim, and not with any desire for sympathy or admiration. Desire one thing alone: that your actions or inactions alike should be worthy of a reasoning citizen.

13. Today I have got myself out of all my perplexities; or rather, I have got the perplexities out of myself – for they were not without, but within; they lay in my own outlook.

14. Everything is banal in experience, fleeting in duration, sordid in content; in all respects the same today as generations now dead and buried have found it to be.

15. Facts stand wholly outside our gates; they are what they are, and no more; they know nothing about themselves, and they pass no judgement upon themselves. What is it, then, that pronounces the judgement? Our own guide and ruler, Reason.

16. A rational and social being is not affected in himself for either better or worse by his feelings, but by his will; just as his outward behaviour, good or bad, is the product of will, not of feelings.

17. For the thrown stone there is no more evil in falling than there is good in rising.

18. Penetrate into their inmost minds, and you will see what manner of critics you are afraid of, and how capable they are of criticizing themselves.

19. All things are in process of change. You yourself are ceaselessly undergoing transformation, and the decay of some of your parts, and so is the whole universe.

20. Leave another's wrongdoing where it lies.

21. In the interruption of an activity, or the discontinuance and, as it were, death of an impulse, or an opinion, there is no evil. Look back at the phases of your own growth: childhood, boyhood, youth, age: each change itself a kind of death. Was this so frightening? Or take the lives you lived under your grandfather and then under your mother and then your father; trace the numerous differences and changes and discontinuances there were in those days, and ask yourself, 'Were they so frightening?' No more so, then, is the cessation, the interruption, the change from life itself.

22. Your own mind, the Mind of the universe, your neighbour's mind – be prompt to explore them all. Your own, so that you may shape it to justice; the universe's, that you may recollect what it is you are a part of; your neighbour's, that you may understand whether it is informed by ignorance or knowledge, and also may recognize that it is kin to your own.

23. As a unit yourself, you help to complete the social whole; and similarly, therefore, your every action should help to complete the social life. Any action which is not related either directly or remotely to this social end disjoints that life, and destroys its unity. It is as much the act of a schismatic as when some citizen in a community does his utmost to dissociate himself from the general accord.

24. Childish squabbles, childish games, 'petty breaths supporting corpses' – why, the ghosts in Homer have more evident reality!

25. First get at the nature and quality of the original cause, separate it from the material to which it has given shape, and study it; then determine the possible duration of its effects.

26. The woes you have had to bear are numberless because you were not content to let Reason, your guide and master, do its natural work. Come now, no more of this!

27. When those about you are venting their censure or malice upon you, or raising any other sort of injurious clamour, approach and penetrate into their souls, and see what manner of men they are. You will find little enough reason for all your painstaking efforts to win their good opinion. All the same, it still remains your duty to think kindly of them; for Nature has made them to be your friends, and even the gods themselves lend them every sort of help, by dreams and by oracles, to gain the ends on which their hearts are set.

28. Upwards and downwards,[1] from age to age, the cycles of the universe follow their unchanging round. It may be that

1. Upwards and downwards; i.e. changing successively from fire to air, air to water, water to earth, and then back again in the reverse order, as Heraclitus taught. (See page 54, note 2.)

the World-Mind wills each separate happening in succession; and if so, then accept the consequences. Or, it may be, there was but one primal act of will, of which all else is the sequel; every event being thus the germ of another. To put it another way, things are either isolated units, or they form one inseparable whole. If that whole be God, then all is well; but if aimless chance, at least you need not be aimless also.

Soon earth will cover us all. Then in time earth, too, will change; later, what issues from this change will itself in turn incessantly change, and so again will all that then takes its place, even unto the world's end. To let the mind dwell on these swiftly rolling billows of change and transformation is to know a contempt for all things mortal.

29. The primal Cause is like a river in flood; it bears everything along. How ignoble are the little men who play at politics and persuade themselves that they are acting in the true spirit of philosophy. Babes, incapable even of wiping their noses! What then, you who are a man? Why, do what nature is asking of you at this moment. Set about it as the opportunity offers, and no glancing around to see if you are observed. But do not expect Plato's ideal commonwealth; be satisfied if even a trifling endeavour comes off well, and count the result no mean success. For who can hope to alter men's convictions; and without change of conviction what can there be but grudging subjection and feigned assent? Oh yes; now go on and talk to me of Alexander, and Philip, and Demetrius of Phaleron.[1] If those men did in truth understand the will of Nature and school themselves to follow it, that is their own affair. But if it was nothing more than a stage-role they were playing, no court has condemned me to imitate their example. Philosophy is a modest profession, all simplicity

1. See page 126, note 1.

and plain dealing. Never try to seduce me into solemn pretentiousness.

30. Look down from above on the numberless herds of mankind, with their mysterious ceremonies, their divers voyagings in storm and calm, and all the chequered pattern of their comings and gatherings and goings. Go on to consider the life of bygone generations; and then the life of all those who are yet to come; and even at the present day, the life of the hordes of far-off savages. In short, reflect what multitudes there are who are ignorant of your very name; how many more will have speedily forgotten it; how many, perhaps praising you now, who will soon enough be abusing you; and that therefore remembrance, glory, and all else together are things of no worth.

31. When beset from without by circumstance, be unperturbed; when prompted from within to action, be just and fair: in fine, let both will and deed issue in behaviour that is social and fulfils the law of your being.

32. Many of the anxieties that harass you are superfluous: being but creatures of your own fancy, you can rid yourself of them and expand into an ampler region, letting your thought sweep over the entire universe, contemplating the illimitable tracts of eternity, marking the swiftness of change in each created thing, and contrasting the brief span between birth and dissolution with the endless aeons that precede the one and the infinity that follows the other.

33. A little while, and all that is before your eyes now will have perished. Those who witness its passing will go the same road themselves before long; and then what will there be to choose between the oldest grandfather and the baby that died in its cradle?

34. Observe the instincts that guide these men; the ends they struggle for; the grounds on which they like and value things. In short, picture their souls laid bare. Yet they imagine their praises or censures have weight to help or hurt. What presumption!

35. Loss is nothing else but change, and change is Nature's delight. Ever since the world began, things have been ordered by her decree in the selfsame fashion as they are at this day, and as other similar things will be ordered to the end of time. How, then, can you say that it is all amiss, and ever will be so; that no power among all the gods in heaven can avail to mend it; and that the world lies condemned to a thraldom of ills without end?

36. The substance of us all is doomed to decay; the moisture and the clay, the bones, and the fetor. Our precious marble is but a callosity of the earth, our gold and silver her sediment; our raiment shreds of hair, our purple a fish's gore; and thus with all things else. So too is the very breath of our lives – ever passing as it does from this one to that.

37. Enough of this miserable way of life, these everlasting grumbles, these monkey antics. Why must you agitate yourself so? Nothing unprecedented is happening; so what is it that disturbs you? The form of it? Take a good look at it. The matter of it? Look well at that, too. Beyond form and matter, there is nothing more. Even at this late hour, set yourself to become a simpler and better man in the sight of the gods. For the mastering of that lesson, three years are as good as a hundred.

38. If he sinned, the harm is his own. Yet perhaps, after all, he did not.

39. Either things must have their origin in one single intelligent source, and all fall into place to compose, as it were, one single body – in which case no part ought to complain of what happens for the good of the whole – or else the world is nothing but atoms and their confused minglings and dispersions. So why be so harassed? Say to the Reason at your helm, 'Come, are you dead and in decay? Is this some part you are playing? Have you sunk to the level of a beast of the field, grazing and herding with the rest?

40. The gods either have power or they have not. If they have not, why pray to them? If they have, then instead of praying to be granted or spared such-and-such a thing, why not rather pray to be delivered from dreading it, or lusting for it, or grieving over it? Clearly, if they can help a man at all, they can help him in this way. You will say, perhaps, 'But all that is something they have put in my own power.' Then surely it were better to use your power and be a free man, than to hanker like a slave and a beggar for something that is not in your power. Besides, who told you the gods never lend their aid even towards things that do lie in our own power? Begin praying in this way, and you will see. Where another man prays 'Grant that I may possess this woman,' let your own prayer be, 'Grant that I may not lust to possess her.' Where he prays, 'Grant me to be rid of such-and-such a one,' you pray, 'Take from me my desire to be rid of him.' Where he begs, 'Spare me the loss of my precious child,' beg rather to be delivered from the terror of losing him. In short, give your petitions a turn in this direction, and see what comes.

41. 'When I was sick,' says Epicurus, 'I never used to talk about my bodily ailments. I did not,' he says, 'discuss any topics of that kind with my visitors. I went on dealing with

the principles of natural philosophy; and the point I particularly dwelt on was how the mind, while having its part in all these commotions of the flesh, can still remain unruffled and pursue its own proper good. Nor,' he adds, 'did I give the doctors a chance to brag of their own triumphs; my life merely went on its normal way, smoothly and happily.' In sickness, then, if you are sick, or in trouble of any other kind, be like Epicurus. Never let go your hold on philosophy for anything that may befall, and never take part in the nonsense that is talked by the ignorant and uninstructed (this is a maxim on which all schools agree). Concentrate wholly on the task before you, and on the instrument you possess for its accomplishment.

42. When you are outraged by somebody's impudence, ask yourself at once, 'Can the world exist without impudent people?' It cannot; so do not ask for impossibilities. That man is simply one of the impudent whose existence is necessary to the world. Keep the same thought present, whenever you come across roguery, double-dealing or any other form of obliquity. You have only to remind yourself that the type is indispensable, and at once you will feel kindlier towards the individual. It is also helpful if you promptly recall what special quality Nature has given us to counter such particular faults. For there are antidotes with which she has provided us: gentleness to meet brutality, for example, and other correctives for other ills. Generally speaking, too, you have the opportunity of showing the culprit his blunder – for everyone who does wrong is failing of his proper objective, and is thereby a blunderer. Besides, what harm have you suffered? Nothing has been done by any of these victims of your irritation that could hurtfully affect your own mind; and it is in the mind alone that anything evil or damaging

to the self can have reality. What is there wrong or surprising, after all, in a boor behaving boorishly? See then if it is not rather yourself you ought to blame, for not foreseeing that he would offend in this way. You, in virtue of your reason, had every means for thinking it probable that he would do so; you forgot this, and now his offence takes you by surprise. When you are indignant with anyone for his perfidy or ingratitude, turn your thoughts first and foremost upon yourself. For the error is clearly your own, if you have put any faith in the good faith of a man of that stamp, or, when you have done him a kindness, if it was not done unreservedly and in the belief that the action would be its own full reward. Once you have done a man a service, what more would you have? Is it not enough to have obeyed the laws of your own nature, without expecting to be paid for it? That is like the eye demanding a reward for seeing, or the feet for walking. It is for that very purpose that they exist; and they have their due in doing what they were created to do. Similarly, man is born for deeds of kindness; and when he has done a kindly action, or otherwise served the common welfare, he has done what he was made for, and has received his quittance.

only signifying an act of nature. Would it be ominous to speak of the gathering of ripe corn.'*

35. 'Green grape, ripe cluster, raisin; every step a change, not into what is not, but what is yet to be.'†

36. 'The robber of your free will,' writes Epictetus, 'does not exist.'‡

37. He says, too, that we ought to evolve some proper system for our use of the assent. In regard to the impulses, we must take care to keep them always subject to modification, free from self-interest, and duly proportioned to the merits of the case. Desires also should be restrained to the utmost, and aversions confined to matters under our own control.

38. 'There is no triviality at issue here,' he says, 'but a plain question of sanity or insanity.'

39. 'Which is it your will to have?' Socrates would ask. 'Souls of reasonable or unreasonable men?' 'Reasonable.' 'Reasonable men who are sound, or sick?' 'Sound.' 'Then why not go seek for them?' 'Because we already have them.' 'In that case, then, why all your strife and contention?'

* Epictetus, 91.
† ibid., 92.
‡ ibid., iii, 22, 105.

BOOK TWELVE

1. All the blessings which you pray to obtain hereafter could be yours today, if you did not deny them to yourself. You have only to have done with the past altogether, commit the future to providence, and simply seek to direct the present hour aright into the paths of holiness and justice: holiness, by a loving acceptance of your apportioned lot, since Nature produced it for you and you for it: justice, in your speech by a frank and straightforward truthfulness, and in your acts by a respect for law and for every man's rights. Allow yourself, too, no hindrance from the malice, misconceptions or slanders of others, nor yet from any sensations this fleshy frame may feel; its afflicted part will look to itself. The hour for your departure draws near; if you will but forget all else and pay sole regard to the helmsman of your soul and the divine spark within you – if you will but exchange your fear of having to end your life some day for a fear of failing even to begin it on nature's true principles – you can yet become a man, worthy of the universe that gave you birth, instead of a stranger in your own homeland, bewildered by each day's happenings as though by wonders unlooked for, and ever hanging upon this one or the next.

2. God views the inner minds of men, stripped of every material sheath and husk and dross. Acting through his thought alone, he makes contact solely with that in them which is an outflow from himself. School yourself to do likewise, and you will be spared many a distraction; for who that looks past this fleshly covering will ever harass himself with

visions of raiment, housing, reputation, or any of the rest of life's costume and scenery?

3. You are composed of three parts: body, breath, and mind. The first two merely belong to you in the sense that you are responsible for their care; the last alone is truly yours. If, then, you put away from this real self – from your understanding, that is – everything that others do or say and everything you yourself did or said in the past, together with every anxiety about the future, and everything affecting the body or its partner breath that is outside your own control, as well as everything that swirls about you in the eddy of outward circumstance, so that the powers of your mind, kept thus aloof and unspotted from all that destiny can do, may live their own life in independence, doing what is just, consenting to what befalls, and speaking what is true – if, I say, you put away from this master-faculty of yours every such clinging attachment, and whatever lies in the years ahead or the years behind, teaching yourself to become what Empedocles calls a 'totally rounded orb, in its own rotundity joying', and to be concerned solely with the life which you are now living, the life of the present moment, then until death comes you will be able to pass the rest of your days in freedom from all anxiety, and in kindliness and good favour with the deity within you.

4. I often marvel how it is that though each man loves himself beyond all else, he should yet value his own opinion of himself less than that of others. Assuredly if some god or sage counsellor were to stand beside him and bid him harbour no thought or purpose in his heart without straightway publishing it abroad, he could not endure it for so much as a single day. So much more regard have we for our neighbours' judgement of us than for our own.

5. Can the gods, who have contrived all else so well and so benevolently, have overlooked this one thing, that even eminently virtuous men, men in the closest correspondence with the divine and living in intimate union with it through their good works and devotion, should know no re-birth after their death, but be doomed to utter extinction? However, should this indeed be their lot, rest assured that if there had been need for some different plan, it would have been so ordained; had it accorded with Nature, Nature would have brought it to pass. Therefore, from its not being so (if in truth it is not), you may have all confidence that it ought not to be so. Surely you can see that in raising idle questions like this you are indicting the deity? For should we even be joining issue with the gods in this way, unless they were supremely good and just? And if they are, how could they ever have permitted anything to be unfairly or unreasonably neglected in their dispositions for the universe?

6. Practise, even when success looks hopeless. The left hand, inept in other respects for lack of practice, can grasp the reins more firmly than the right, because here it has had practice.

7. Meditate upon what you ought to be in body and soul when death overtakes you; meditate upon the brevity of life, and the measureless gulfs of eternity behind it and before, and upon the frailty of everything material.

8. Look at the inmost causes of things, stripped of their husks; note the intentions that underlie actions; study the essences of pain, pleasure, death, glory; observe how man's disquiet is all of his own making, and how troubles come never from another's hand, but like all else are creatures of our own opinion.

9. In the management of your principles, take example by the

pugilist, not the swordsman. One puts down his blade and has to pick it up again; the other is never without his hand, and so needs only to clench it.

10. See what things consist of; resolve them into their matter, form, and purpose.

11. How ample are the privileges vouchsafed to man – to do nothing but what God will approve, and accept everything God may assign!

12. No blame for the order of things can lie with the gods, since nothing amiss can be done by them, either willingly or otherwise; nor yet with men, whose misdoings are none of their own volition. Abstain then from all thoughts of blame.

13. How ludicrous and outlandish is astonishment at anything that happens in life!

14. There is a doom inexorable and a law inviolable, or there is a providence that can be merciful, or else there is a chaos that is purposeless and ungoverned. If a resistless fate, why try to struggle against it? If a providence willing to show mercy, do your best to deserve its divine succour. If a chaos undirected, give thanks that amid such stormy seas you have within you a mind at the helm. If the waters overwhelm you, let them overwhelm flesh, breath, and all else, but they will never make shipwreck of the mind.

15. Does the lantern's flame shine with undimmed brilliance until it is quenched, yet shall truth, wisdom, and justice die within you before you yourself are extinguished?

16. At the impression that somebody has done wrong, reflect, 'What certainty have I that it is wrong?' Furthermore, even if it is, may he not already have reproached himself for

it, fully as much as though his nails had visibly rent his features? To wish that a rogue would never do wrong is like wishing that fig-trees would never have any sour juice in their fruit, infants never cry, horses never neigh, or any other of life's inevitabilities never come to pass. How, pray, could he act otherwise, with the character he has? If you find it so vexatious, then reform it.

17. If it is not the right thing to do, never do it; if it is not the truth, never say it. Keep your impulses in hand.

18. Always look at the whole of a thing. Find what it is that makes its impression on you, then open it up and dissect it into cause, matter, purpose, and the length of time before it must end.

19. Try to see, before it is too late, that you have within you something higher and more godlike than mere instincts which move your emotions and twitch you like a puppet. Which of these is it, then, that is clouding my understanding at this moment? Fear, jealousy, lust, or some other?

20. Firstly, avoid all actions that are haphazard or purposeless; and secondly, let every action aim solely at the common good.

21. Soon enough, remember, you yourself must become a vagrant thing of nothingness; soon enough everything that now meets your eye, together with all those in whom is now the breath of life, must be no more. For all things are born to change and pass away and perish, that others in their turn may come to be.

22. Everything is but what your opinion makes it; and that opinion lies with yourself. Renounce it when you will, and at

once you have rounded the foreland and all is calm; a tranquil sea, a tideless haven.

23. When an operation, no matter of what sort, is brought to a close at the right moment, the stoppage does it no harm and the agent himself is no worse for discontinuing his action. So if life itself – which is nothing but the totality of all our operations – also ceases when the time comes, it takes no hurt by its mere cessation, nor is he adversely affected who thus brings the whole series of his operations to its timely conclusion. But the proper hour and term are fixed by nature: if not by a man's own nature – as, for example, through old age – then at all events by great Nature herself, by whose continuous renewing of her every part the universe remains forever young and vigorous. Whatever serves the purpose of the Whole is kept always fair and blooming. It follows, then, that the ending of his life can be no evil to a man – for, being a thing outside his control and innocent of all self-seeking, there is nothing in it to degrade him – nay, it is even a good, inasmuch as for the universe it is something opportune, serviceable and in keeping with all else. Thus, by following the way of God and being at one with him in thought, man is borne onward by the divine hand.

24. There are three counsels worth keeping in mind. The first concerns actions: these should never be undertaken at random, nor in ways unsanctioned by justice. You must remember that all outward events are the result of either chance or providence; and you cannot reprimand chance or impeach providence. In the second place, think well what everything is, from earliest seed to birth of soul and from soul's birth to its ultimate surrender; what the thing is compounded of, and what it will dissolve into. Thirdly, imagine yourself suddenly carried up into the clouds and looking down on the whole

panorama of human activities: how the scene would excite your contempt, now that you could discern the multitude of aerial and heavenly beings who throng around them. Furthermore, reflect that no matter how often upborne in this way, you would still behold the same sights, in all their monotony and transience. Yet these are the things of which we make such a boast!

25. Once dismiss the view you take, and you are out of danger. Who, then, is hindering such dismissal?

26. When you let yourself feel resentment at a thing, you forget that nothing can come about except in obedience to Nature; that any misconduct in the matter was none of yours; and moreover, that this is the only way in which things have always happened, will always happen, and do always happen. You are forgetting, too, the closeness of man's brotherhood with his kind; a brotherhood not of blood or human seed, but of a common intelligence; and that this intelligence in every man is God, an emanation from the deity. You forget that nothing is properly a man's own, for even his child, his body, his soul itself, all come from this same God; also, that all things depend upon opinion; also, that the passing moment is all that a man can ever live or lose.

27. Ponder the lives of the men who have set no bounds to their passions, the men who have reached the very summits of glory, disaster, odium, or any other of the peaks of chance; and then consider, 'Where are they all now?' Vapour, ashes, a tale; perhaps not even a tale. Contemplate the numerous examples: Fabius Catullinus on his estate, Lucius Lupus in his gardens, Stertinius at Baiae, Tiberius at Capri, Velius Rufus; any instance at all of what pride can set its heart upon. How ignoble are all their strivings! How much more

befitting a philosopher it were to aim at justice, temperance and fealty to the gods – yet always with simplicity, for the pride that swells beneath a garb of humility is of all things the most intolerable.

28. To those who insist, 'Where have you ever seen the gods, and how can you be so assured of their existence, that you worship them in this way?' my answer is, 'For one thing, they are perfectly visible to the eye.[1] For another, I have never seen my own soul either, but none the less do I venerate that. So it is with the gods; it is experience which proves their power every day, and therefore I am satisfied that they exist, and I do them reverence.'

29. For a life that is sound and secure, cultivate a thorough insight into things and discover their essence, matter, and cause; put your whole heart into doing what is just, and speaking what is true; and for the rest, know the joy of life by piling good deed on good deed until no rift or cranny appears between them.

30. Sunlight is all one, even when it is broken up by walls, mountains, and a host of other things. Substance is all one, even when it is parcelled out among the numberless living bodies of different sorts, each with its own special qualities. Soul is all one, even when it is distributed among countless natures of every kind in countless differing proportions. Even soul that is gifted with the additional quality of thought, though apparently divisible, is likewise all one. For the other parts of all those organisms – their breath, for example – are material things, incapable of sensation, which have no affinity with each other and are only kept together by the unifying

1. The Stoics believed the stars to be divine.

pressure of gravitation. But thought, by its very nature, tends spontaneously towards anything of its own kind and mingles with it; so that the instinct for unity is not frustrated.

31. Why do you hunger for length of days? Is it to experience sensations and desires, or increase or cessation of growth? Is it to make use of the powers of speech or thought? Does any of these things seem really worth coveting? Then if you think them beneath your notice, press on towards the final goal of all – which is the following of reason and of God. But to prize this, you must remember, is incompatible with any feelings of resentment that death will rob you of the others.

32. How small a fraction of all the measureless infinity of time is allotted to each one of us; an instant, and it vanishes into eternity. How puny, too, is your portion of all the world's substance; how insignificant your share of all the world's soul; on how minute a speck of the whole earth do you creep. As you ponder these things, make up your mind that nothing is of any import save to do what your own nature directs, and to bear what the world's Nature sends you.

33. How is my soul's helmsman going about his task? For in that lies everything. All else, within my control or beyond it, is dead bones and vapour.

34. Nothing will more encourage a contempt for death than the reflection that even men who accounted pleasure a good and pain an evil have nevertheless been able to despise it.

35. When a man finds his sole good in that which the appointed hour brings him; when he cares not if his actions be many or few, so they accord with strict reason; when it matters nought to him whether his glimpse of this world be long or fleeting – not death itself can be a thing of terror for him.

36. O man, citizenship of this great world-city has been yours. Whether for five years or fivescore, what is that to you? Whatever the law of that city decrees is fair to one and all alike. Wherein, then, is your grievance? You are not ejected from the city by any unjust judge or tyrant, but by the selfsame Nature which brought you into it; just as when an actor is dismissed by the manager who engaged him. 'But I have played no more than three of the five acts.' Just so; in your drama of life, three acts are all the play. Its point of completeness is determined by him who formerly sanctioned your creation, and today sanctions your dissolution. Neither of those decisions lay within yourself. Pass on your way, then, with a smiling face, under the smile of him who bids you go.