

(editor's note: This paper was transcribed from a handwritten cursive copy with various difficulties. For a perfect rendition, the reader might wish to consult the original, itself a copy, in the volume entitled Literary Club Papers 2, 1886 – 1887 June 5, '86 to May 21, '87). The transcriptionist has not searched out names that were unclearly transcribed on the page, nor added greek characters, that were unclearly transcribed in the original.

Note; There are no paragraphs show. In the original.

Marcus Aurelius Antonius

In the short paper am about to read concerning the Emperor Marcus Aurelius Antonius I shall confine myself for the most part to his studies and attainments in ethics, on morals for in that respect alone, he seems to me well worthy of an evening's consideration.

Marcus Aurelius Verus, son of Marcus Annius Verus, known to us as Marcus Aurelius Antonius was born April 25th A. D. 121. Litus Antonius Pius had married the sister of Annius Verus and so had become the uncle of young Marcus. Having no son, he adopted Marcus when he was eight or nine years of age, and then changed his name to Marcus Aurelius Antonius. It is worth noticing that beginning with the reign of Nerva, by reason of the failure of male descendents, the succession to the Empire was provided for by adoption through several reigns. Thus Nerva adopted Trajan Trajan adopted Hadrian, Hadrian adopted Titus Antonius Pius, and Titus Antonius Pius adopted Marcus Aurelius Antonius. The period covered by these successive reigns from A.D. 97 to A.D. 180 was the golden period of good government in Rome and the cultivation of philosophy as well as of general literature. At no time during the history of Rome did peace and prosperity so prevail. At no time were there such favorable opportunities for study, especially the study of philosophy. At no time in history of the world as such another era happened. Marcus seems to have began his studies under masters or tutors at about the age of twelve. He studied poetry, rhetoric and law at first as was customary among the Romans, and it must be remembered that with them rhetoric was a much broader term than with us. Perhaps those studies interested him as much as they do the ordinary undergraduate now, but they do not seem to have had any great attraction for him, though he refers to some of his teachers in terms of affection and to some in terms of the highest commendation, and in many of these passages he gives us a very clear insight to his mind. Showing him to have been a young man of unusually affectionate and generous impulses & what is of more importance we see the decided bent of his mind and his natural inclinations toward the study of moral philosophy in a very early age. Just what time he began to think for himself and to formulate those opinions about ethical philosophy which has certainly made him prominent among rulers and have made him to be called the wisest and just man given to the earth save one. We cannot tell, for the greater part of his writings preserved to us were written after he came to the throne in all probability, and he did not come to the throne till he was about forty years of age

and unfortunately we have no way of determining, or seeing, the growth of his mind, but in that respect we are no more fortunate with the one wiser than he. We may infer from what he himself says, that Junius Rusticus, one of his teachers who became one of his chief advisors after he came to the throne first made him acquainted with the works of Epictetus, which works Rusticus seems to have had in his own possession in some form, perhaps in one of the transcripts or excerpts, taken from the original notes made by Adrian, the favorite pupil of Epictetus, who made notes of the lectures of his master as they were delivered. Doubtless too, Marcus was taught in the philosophy of the Grecian schools as it was handed down through the various disciples of Zeno the founder of the Stoic school. We may learn from his writings that he had no less than ten or twelve of the most eminent scholars of his age as teachers: some Romans but the greater part Grecians. Some of them may have been brought to Rome as his teachers, or as he grew to manhood some may have been drawn to Rome by the power of his character, talents and acquirements. As he attached himself to the school of the Stoics it may not be out of place to give a brief sketch of the two men who preceded him, and had given birth name & fame to the Stoic school. About the year 310 BC while the Generals who had served under Alexander the Great were quarreling over the division among themselves of the great empire he had created in one campaign, a young merchant named Zeno came to Athens from a little town in the island of Cyprus in the easternmost part of the Mediterranean Sea. Athens was then the intellectual center of the world, and this young merchant after attending upon the teachings of the number of the philosophers of that time, took up himself the vocation of a teacher, and founded the school of the Stoics, so called from the Greek word Stoa, a porch, indicating the place where he walked as he talked. The teachers of those days were not a sedentary class, if we may except Diogenes who was only happy when sitting in the eye of the sun. Zeno established his school when he was about forty-eight years of age and maintained it for fifty years dying at the age of ninety-eight. Zeno well deserved to rank among the first teachers of history, for his teachings of all the many of the schools of Athens, finally formed a permanent lodgment in the fundamental principles adopted and explained by Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius. After the death of Zeno however, his doctrines became but a [sounding name] indicating certain qualities that we now comprise in the word Stoic and having fruit only in the [] of Brutus, Cato and Seneca. During the reign of Nero he had a freed-man by the name of Epaphroditus, and he in turn had a slave weak of body & crippled by the name of Epictetus. Seeing in the slave perhaps, mental qualities of a high order Epaphroditus sent him to the best schools in Rome, for it was fashionable among the rich men of that day to educate their slaves so that they might be able to boast of having poets, rhetoricians and philosophers in their households. Epictetus seems to have become interested in the doctrines of the Stoic school, and upon his Master being put to death by Domniation (sic), in some way obtained his freedom and began to teach in Rome. Afterwards, he, with many others, was expelled from

Rome by Domitian and retired to a little town in Greece and there spent the remainder of his life teaching the doctrines of Zeno, as has been said, Rusticus a favorite pupil wrote down part of his discourses and part of what was written down has been preserved. Such in brief is the school of philosophy to which Marcus Aurelius attached himself, and of which he became not only the most devoted scholar but of which he also became the most illustrious example. As I said at the outset I intend to devote my time to his opinions, studies and attainments, and I know no better way to do that than to make extracts from his own writings and first as to himself, while he was still a young man, and his teachers. Perhaps I should say first, of his parents, for we should expect him to be a devoted and affectionate son. He says that he learned from his grandfather, who was of the same name as his father Annius Verus, good morals, and the government of his temper; and from the reputation and remembrance of his father who died when he was young, modesty and a manly character; and from his mother, who was of a noble Roman house, piety and beneficence; and abstinence not only from evil deeds but from evil thoughts. From one Severus, whom he called his brother, but as he had no brother, he may refer to some one of his relatives who was as dear to him as a brother, he says he learned to love his kin, to love truth and justice, and he says further that through him he became acquainted with the lives Therasea, Helvidius, Cato, Dion and Brutus, all of whom were justly celebrated in Rome. He says that he learned from his teacher Diognotus, not to busy himself about trifling matters, and also that from him he learned the art of composition in his youth. He says that from L. Junius Rusticus who, it as has been said, was both his teacher and his advisor after he came to the throne he learned not to be delivering little short-story orations, and to abstain from rhetoric (probably in the narrow sense) poetry and fine writing; and with respect to those who had offended him, or done him wrong, to be easily disposed to be pacified, and reconciled; to read carefully, and not to be satisfied with a superficial understanding of a book; and not to give too hasty an assent to those who talked over-much. He says that he learned from Apollonius, who came from Chalcis to Rome to become one of his teachers, freedom of will and undeviating steadiness of purpose, and to be always the same whether circumstances were favorable or adverse, and to receive from friends such things as would be esteemed favors, without either showing too much appreciation or letting them pass unnoticed. He says of Lextus of Cheronea, a grandson of Plutarch, that he had the power of accommodating himself to all, so that intercourse with him was more agreeable than flattery; that he had the facility of discovering and ordering in an intelligent and methodical way the principles necessary for life; that he could express approbation without display and much knowledge without making a vain show of it. He says of another that he refrained from fault finding, and did not chide those who used any barbarous expressions but would dexterously introduce the expressions that want to have been used, by way of answers or by joining in some enquiry about the topic of conversation. He says of another that everybody believed in his sincerity that he thought as he

spoke and that in all he did he had no secret or deceitful intention; that he so bore himself that no one would think he was despised of him, and yet at the same time, no one dared treat him as an inferior. He has many other words of praise for other teachers but I have quoted enough I think, to show in him an unusual faculty of discrimination and to show how among all his teachers, he was able to select the salient characteristics of each, so as to convey to us a clear idea of the superior qualities of those who surrounded him, and contributed toward the formation of his character and his mental attainments, so that in these little sketches we have the reflex image of the man himself. I will undertake in the same way and as briefly as possible, to show what the fundamental principles of his philosophy were. It is not easy to construe accurately all he has said, for what he has written, has not been written as though he were a teacher but as though he were jotting down his thoughts for his own pleasure and as aids to his own reflections. Some of the minor stoic philosophers, following close upon Zeno, unlike Zeno, whose system was very simple, undertook to make a division of philosophy into various parts, as dialectic, rhetoric, ethics, physics, politics and theology. It is said that Zeno divided his philosophy into physics or matter, ethics or morals, or man's conduct, and logic, the reason – divinity. Others dispute this and say that Zeno used but the two terms, which were equivalent to matter and the deity. This I think the more likely, and what other divisions were introduced afterwards; for the scholastic Greeks were natural metaphysicians. However that may be it is certain that Marcus ignored all the subtle divisions. The Roman mind was a practical one, and cared little for hairsplitting. Their orators, as Cicero, were full of invective imagery and high sounding words, but they seldom or never indulged in any subtle reasoning. Marcus calls his whole subject Ethics. His ethics is founded on the nature of things or matter; the nature of the deity or the gods; and the relation of man to both. One of his sayings was, that the universe, meaning all matter, is wisely ordered, that every man is in a sense, a part of it, and must conform to it because he cannot change it. He says that whatever the deity has done is good: that all mankind are a man's brethren; that he must cherish them and try to make them better, even those who would do him harm. Here we have the Deity governing the universe by a system of laws, which man cannot change while between them stands the universal brotherhood of man. Again he says that some part of the deity has entered into and become a part of every man, that the intellect or intelligence side of the deity has touched the soul or intelligence side of man and that philosophy rightly understood and practiced will enable us to keep the divinity within the man free from violence and unharmed, superior to pains and pleasure, doing nothing without a purpose, nor yet falsely and with hypocrisy, not feeling the use of another man's doing or not doing anything, besides accepting all that happens and all that is allotted, as coming from thence, wherever it is from whence he himself came and finally waiting for death with a cheerful mind as being nothing else than a dissolution of the elements of which every living thing is compounded. Here we had his idea of man's relation to the deity as

being such a part of the deity as nothing can harm, not even death and a final dissolution. It would not be a far fetched inference, I think, if we construed this passage to mean that the earthly part of man goes back to matter, the soul to the place whence it came. He also distinguishes between the universe, the whole, and a power superior to the universe. In one place, he says that there is one common substance, out of which all things are made, and which is distributed among countless bodies. The common substance undoubtedly means matter, the superior governing of the universe force he calls λογος or reason. This expression closer resembles the first verse of the first chapter of John, "In the beginning was the word (Logos) and the Word was with God and the Word was God." The obvious meaning of this verse is that God and reason are one and the same. Zeno thought that there are two original principles one, matter, or literally the stuff out of which things are made, and Logos which is eternal, and operates through Chule, and produces all things. According to this view both God and matter are eternal, but they exist independently and God governs matter. Marcus seems not to have inquired concerning their origin. He also speaks of a greater power controlling the universe in the same sense that intelligence (governs man) or Nous governs man. We have bodies, he says like the animals, but we have reason and intelligence like the gods. Animals have life but man has a rational intelligent soul. In this passage he uses the same word Ruke both for the life of animals and for the soul of man but the qualifying adjectives applied to the soul of man such as Logika and Noera show that the word is used in a different sense in the two cases. Marcus also says that the universe is governed by fixed laws, if we construe a figure of speech used by him. He says that which exists is in a manner that which will be. I think he means to say that things are produced according to certain fixed laws. He also in several places uses the word nature in the sense of a system of order of things. He did not recognize any principle of evil in the universe. In this respect his philosophy stands almost if not entirely alone. In all the religious systems known to us we find the principal or power of good, and also the principle or power of evil. In some the power of evil seems to be the greater. It may easily be seen that all judge from the appearance of things. And it is all the more remarkable that we should find one who has satisfied himself by a priori reasoning that there is no such thing as a principle of evil in the universe. Milton seems to have permanently engrafted upon the Christian philosophy the idea of a personal actual principle of evil which he calls Satan: and this too without any reasoning on the subject, but because it was necessary to the rounding out of his wonderful poetic story. Unfortunately the Christian world seems to have adopted Milton's idea as Sacred truth. In the myth, as it appears in Genesis, the principle of evil is a despised reptile, tempting man from the path of obedience to the laws of the deity, of whom the deity said "He shall bruise thy head and thou shalt bruise his heel." Marcus says that if we admit the existence of a deity superior to matter we must admit that he orders all things wisely and well; to admit that any principle of evil exists in the world, would be to admit that the deity had not ordered all things well. He admits that any one may

have evil in himself, for every one is free to lead such a life as pleases him. He admits too that the evil minded may sometimes attempt to do evil to the good, but that they cannot harm the good. It is at least clear that he distinguishes between evil as a principal, and the harm done to one person by another, which according to his view is not evil at all, but may on the other hand be productive of good to the person, against whom the injuries directed. Epictetus says something of the same kind in a figurative way "A mark is not set up for the purpose of missing it" that is to say, God who ordered the universe did not so order it as that it should fail by reason of the introduction of evil in it. Marcus says again the gods do exist, and they do care for human things, and they have put all the means in Man's power to enable him not to fall into real evils. And as to the rest, if there could be any evil they would have provided for this also, that it should be in man's power not to fall into it. Speaking of the events which come to all alike and therefore cannot be considered evil he says, "Death is certain, in life, honor and dishonor, pain and pleasure; all these things equally happen to good and bad men, being things which make us neither better nor worse, therefore they are neither good nor evil." As the master has said, "he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and the unjust." He does not say positively whether or not he believes in a future life. Like the wisest of the ancient philosophers, save one, he prepares himself for such a contingency but seems to be uncertain what will become of the soul of man after death. He says, life is a warfare and a stranger's sojourn, "Thou hast embarked, thou hast made the voyage, thou art come to shore; get out," If indeed to another life there will be no want of Gods. But if to a state without sensation then will cause to be held by pains and pleasures and to be a slave to the vessel which is as much inferior as that which serves it is superior, for the one is intelligence and deity and the other is Earth and corruption. It is not death that a man should fear, but he should fear never beginning to live according to nature. Every man should live in such a way as to discharge his duty and to trouble himself about nothing else. He should live such a life that he shall always be ready for death and shall depart content when the summons comes." Some of his expressions as to right living are worthy of notice. He says, "Every man should have an object or purpose in life, that he may direct all his energies to it. He who has none cannot be one and the same man all through his life. He who can propose to himself good and virtuous ends of life and be true to them cannot fail to live conformably to his own interest and the universal interest, for in the nature of things these are one. The practice of truth is a virtue and a means to a virtue, for lying even in an different things, weakens the understanding, while lying maliciously is as bad an offense as a man can be guilty of – both as showing an habitual disposition and also as viewed with respect to consequences. Speaking of government he says it should be administered with regard to equal rights and freedom of speech and that the best government is that which respects most of all the freedom of the governed. Laying down a rule for himself, he says, "Every moment think steadily, as a Roman, and a man to do what thou hast in hand with perfect and simple dignity,

and feelings of affection, and freedom and justice. To every act of thy life as though it were to be the last, laying aside all hypocrisy and self love, and discontent with the portion which has been allotted to thee. Thou seeist how few things are the which if a man lays hold of, he is able to live a life which flows in quiet, and is like the existence of the gods" I have more than exhausted the time I had allotted to my subject. I will close with the last passage of his writings. "Man! Thou hast been a citizen in this great state; what difference does it make whether for five years or for three, Where is the hardship then, if nature, who brought thee into the state sends thee away from it? The same as if a Practor who had employed an actor dismisses him from the stage. "But" says the actor "I have not finished the five acts, only three of them!" Thou sayest well, but in life three acts are the whole drama, for what shall be a complete drama shall be determined by Him who was the cause of its composition, and now of its dissolution but thou art the cause of neither. Depart then satisfied for He also who releases thee is satisfied.

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