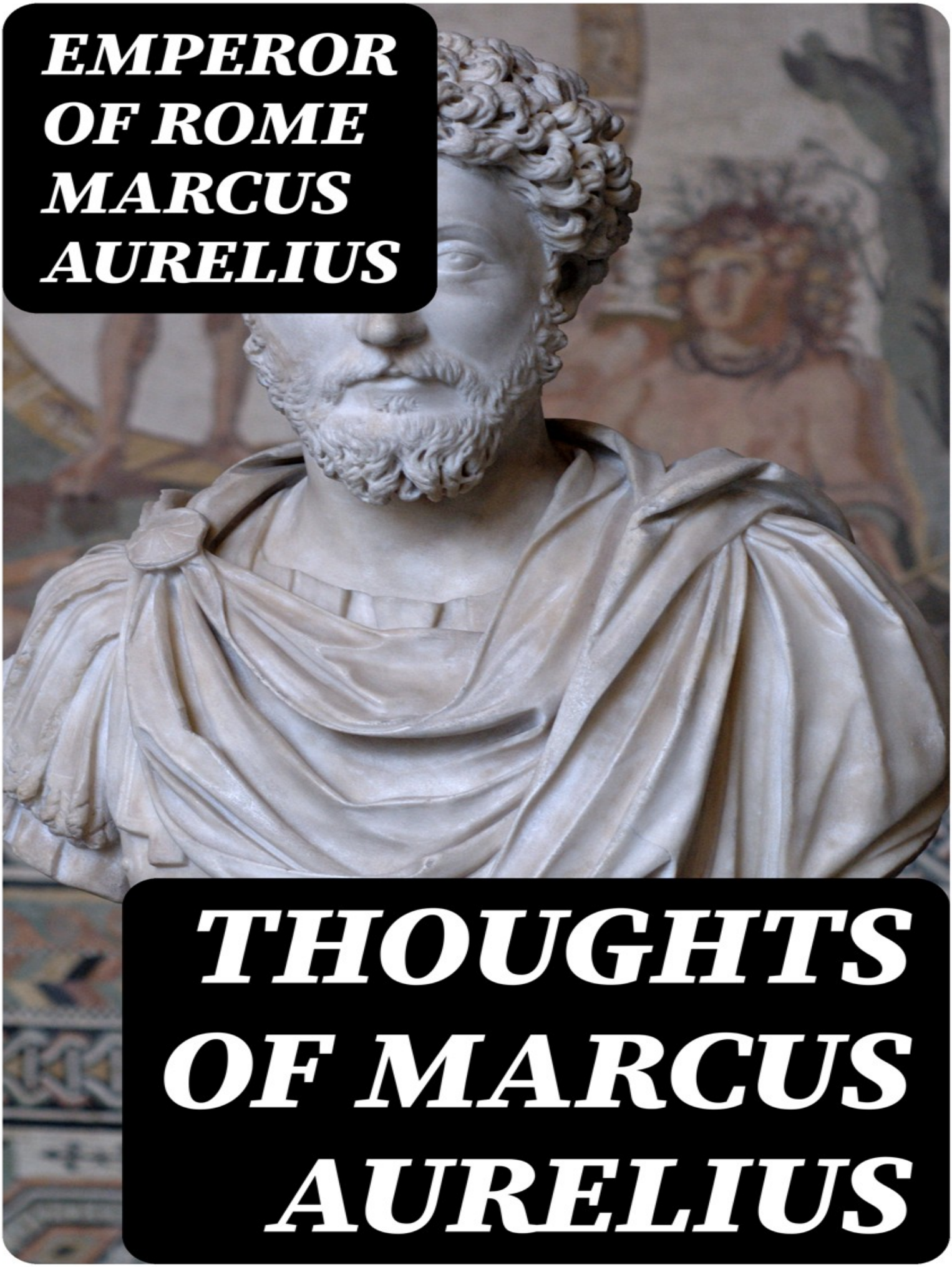
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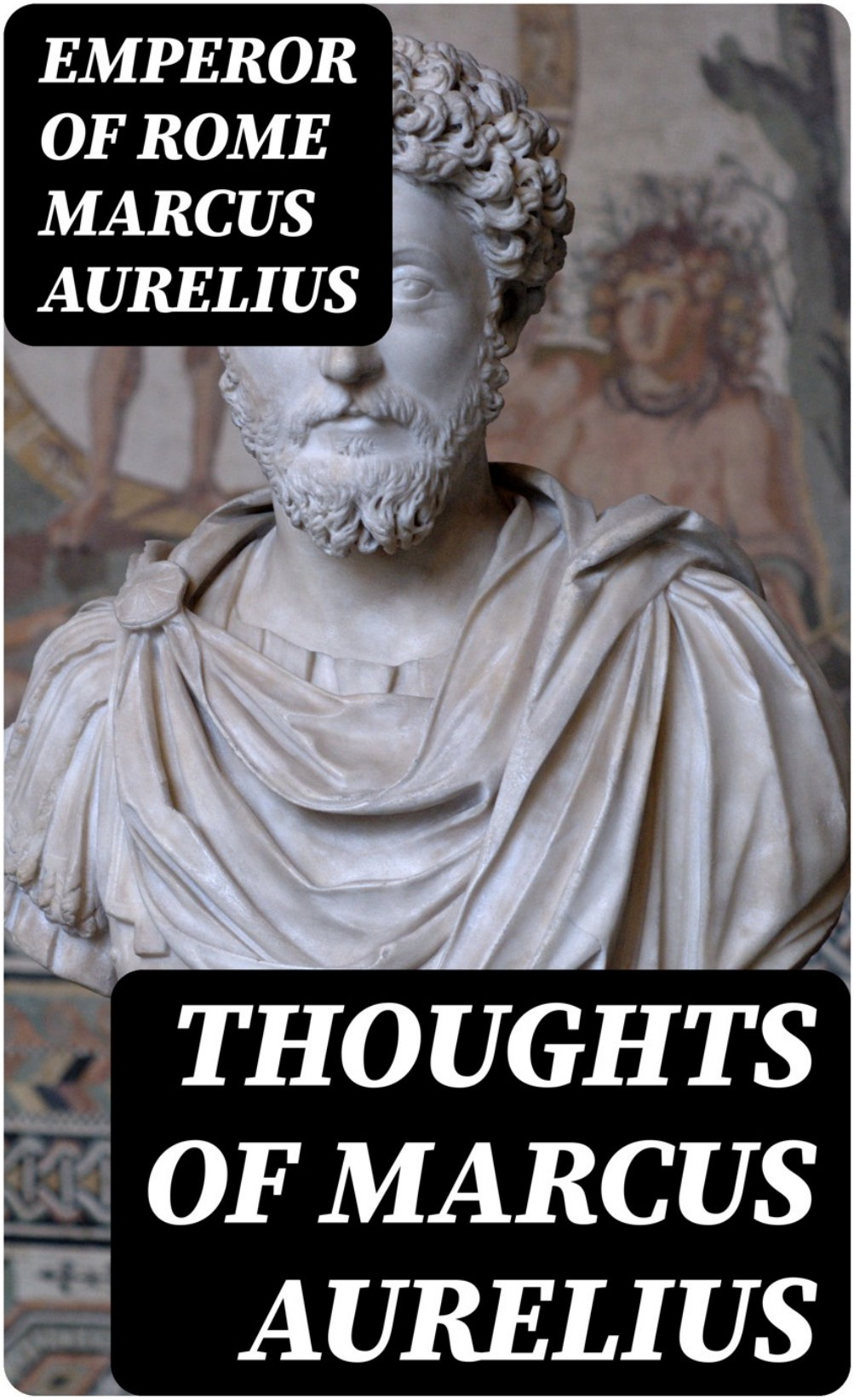

THOUGHTS OF MARCUS AURELIUS

Emperor of Rome Marcus Aurelius

Thoughts of Marcus Aurelius

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PREFACE.

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Perhaps some may question the wisdom of putting out the Thoughts of Marcus Aurelius Antoninus to be used as a Reader by children in the schools. It may appear to them better suited to the mature mind. The principle, however, that has governed us in selecting reading for the young has been to secure the best that we could find in all ages for grown-up people. The milk and water diet provided for "my dear children" is not especially complimentary to them. They like to be treated like little men and women, capable of appreciating a good thing. One finds in this royal

philosopher a rare generosity, sweetness and humility, qualities alike suited to all ages.

Adopting the philosopher's robe at twelve, he remains a student all his life. The precepts that he would give for the government of others, he has practised upon himself. In his time, as in ours, there were good physicians for the mind and body, who could make wise prescriptions for the government of their neighbors, but were unable to apply them to themselves. The faults of our fellows are so numerous and so easy to cure that one is readily tempted to become the physician, while our own faults are so few and so unimportant that it is hardly worth while to give any attention to them. Hence we have a multitude of physicians for humanity in general, and a scarcity of individual healers.

It was the doctrine of Marcus Aurelius that most of the ills of life come to us from our own imagination, that it was not in the power of others seriously to interfere with the calm, temperate life of an individual, and that when a fellow being did anything to us that seemed unjust he was acting in ignorance, and that instead of stirring up anger within us it should stir our pity for him. Oftentimes by careful self-examination we should find that the fault was more our own than that of our fellow, and our sufferings were rather from our own opinions than from anything real. The circle of man's knowledge is very limited, and the largest circles do not wholly include the smallest. They are intersecting and the segment common to any two is very small. Whatever lies outside this space does not exist for both. Hence arise innumerable contests. The man having the largest intelligence ought to be very generous to the other. Being

thankful that he has been blessed in so many ways, he should do all in his power to enlighten his less favored fellow, rather than be angry with him on account of his misfortune. Is he not sufficiently punished in being denied the light?

Assisting his uncle in the government of the great Roman Empire at seventeen, it was his aim constantly to restrain the power of the strong and to assist the weak. He studied the laws of his country, not for wisdom alone, but that he might make them more beneficial to his people. All his life he tried to bring his fellows to a higher level, and to think charitably of each other. Occupying himself a palace he lived simply, like other men. It was his greatest delight to retire to his country home and there, dwelling among his books, to meditate upon the great problems of life. He claimed that a man's life should be valued according to the value of the things to which he gave his attention. If his whole thought was given to clothing, feeding and housing himself comfortably, he should be valued like other well-housed and well-fed animals. He would, however, derive the greatest pleasure and benefit in this life by acting in accordance with reason, which demands of every human being that his highest faculties should govern all the rest, and that each should see to it that he treated his fellow kindly and generously and that if he could not assist him to a higher level he should at least not stand in his way. When he speaks of the shortness of time and the value of fame, riches and power, for which men strive in this world, he speaks not from the standpoint of one who would wish to obtain these things, but as a Roman emperor enjoying the

highest honors that man might expect to attain in this world. He certainly was in a position to speak intelligently concerning these matters, and his opinions ought to have weight with the coming generations. Children may not prefer to read such thoughts; perhaps the majority of children do not prefer the Bible to other books. Still, we all think it is well for them to be obliged to read it. Perhaps requiring the use of such literature in the schools might be as valuable as the adding, subtracting, multiplying and dividing of interminable numbers, the memorizing of all the capes, bays and rivers in the world, and the dates of all the battles that have occurred since the creation of man. We should strive to stimulate the thinking powers of children, leading them to form wise judgments concerning the important things of life, without catering too much to their own wishes at an age when they cannot form an intelligent opinion of what is best for themselves.

At our first reading of the Thoughts of Marcus Aurelius Antoninus, we marked many sentences that appeared to us specially good; in the second, twice as many more. Where all is good it is hard to emphasize, but we will cite just one of his reflections, as illustrating the trend of his mind: "I have often wondered," he says, "how it is that every man loves himself more than all the rest of men, and yet sets less value on his own opinion of himself than on the opinion of others."

We have given Long's translation of the Thoughts complete, as published by Messrs. Little, Brown & Co., but we have omitted some unimportant portions of the biography and philosophy in the interest of space and

economy. We have also given the philosophy in a supplement, thinking it better that it should come after the Thoughts themselves. We shall issue a pocket edition on very thin paper for the convenience of such as wish to make a special study of the work. We also propose to issue a similar edition of the writings of Epictetus.

EDWIN GINN.

January 20, 1893.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH OF MARCUS AURELIUS ANTONINUS.

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M. Antoninus, the son of Annius Verus and Domitia Calvilla, was born at Rome, A.D. 121. The Emperor T. Antoninus Pius married Faustina, the sister of Annius Verus, and was consequently the uncle of M. Antoninus. When Hadrian adopted Antoninus Pius and declared him his successor in the empire, Antoninus Pius adopted both L. Ceionius Commodus and M. Antoninus, generally called M. Aurelius Antoninus.

The youth was most carefully brought up. He thanks the gods (I. 17) that he had good grandfathers, good parents, a good sister, good teachers, good associates, good kinsmen and friends, nearly everything good. He had the happy

fortune to witness the example of his uncle and adoptive father, Antoninus Pius, and he has recorded in his work (I. 16; VI. 30) the virtues of this excellent man and prudent ruler. Like many young Romans he tried his hand at poetry and studied rhetoric. There are letters extant showing the great affection of the pupil for the master, and the master's great hopes of his industrious pupil.

When he was eleven years old he assumed the dress of philosophers, something plain and coarse, became a hard student, and lived a most laborious, abstemious life, even so far as to injure his health. He abandoned poetry and rhetoric for philosophy, and attached himself to the sect of the Stoics. But he did not neglect the study of law, which was a useful preparation for the high place which he was designed to fill. We must suppose that he learned the Roman discipline of arms, which was a necessary part of the education of a man who afterwards led his troops to battle against a warlike race.

Antoninus has recorded in his first book the names of his teachers, and the obligations which he owed to each of them. The way in which he speaks of what he learned from them might seem to savor of vanity or self- praise, if we look carelessly at the way in which he has expressed himself; but if anyone draws this conclusion, he will be mistaken. Antoninus means to commemorate the merits of his several teachers, what they taught, and what a pupil might learn from them. Besides, this book, like the eleven other books, was for his own use; and if we may trust the note at the end of the first book, it was written during one of M. Antoninus' campaigns against the Quadi, at a time when the

commemoration of the virtues of his illustrious teachers might remind him of their lessons and the practical uses which he might derive from them.

Among his teachers of philosophy was Sextus of Chaeroneia, a grandson of Plutarch. What he learned from this excellent man is told by himself (I. 9). His favorite teacher was Rusticus (I. 7), a philosopher, and also a man of practical good sense in public affairs. Rusticus was the adviser of Antoninus after he became emperor. Young men who are destined for high places are not often fortunate in those who are about them, their companions and teachers; and I do not know any example of a young prince having had an education which can be compared with that of M. Antoninus. Such a body of teachers distinguished by their acquirements and their character will hardly be collected again; and as to the pupil, we have not had one like him since.

Hadrian died in July, A.D. 138, and was succeeded by Antoninus Pius. M. Antoninus married Faustina, his cousin, the daughter of Pius, probably about A.D. 146, for he had a daughter born in A.D. 147. He received from his adoptive father the title of Caesar, and was associated with him in the administration of the state. The father and the adopted son lived together in perfect friendship and confidence. Antoninus was a dutiful son, and the emperor Pius loved and esteemed him.

Antoninus Pius died A.D. 161. The Senate, it is said, urged M. Antoninus to take the sole administration of the empire, but he associated with himself the other adopted son of Pius, L. Ceionius Commodus, who is generally called

L. Verus. Thus Rome for the first time had two emperors. Verus was an indolent man of pleasure, and unworthy of his station. Antoninus however bore with him, and it is said that Verus had sense enough to pay to his colleague the respect due to his character. A virtuous emperor and a loose partner lived together in peace, and their alliance was strengthened by Antoninus giving to Verus for wife his daughter Lucilla.

The reign of Antoninus was first troubled by a Parthian war, in which Verus was sent to command; but he did nothing, and the success that was obtained by the Romans in Armenia and on the Euphrates and Tigris was due to his generals. This Parthian war ended in A.D. 165. Aurelius and Verus had a triumph (A.D. 166) for the victories in the East. A pestilence followed, which carried off great numbers in Rome and Italy, and spread to the west of Europe.

The north of Italy was also threatened by the rude people beyond the Alps from the borders of Gallia to the eastern side of the Hadriatic. These barbarians attempted to break into Italy, as the Germanic nations had attempted near three hundred years before; and the rest of the life of Antoninus, with some intervals, was employed in driving back the invaders. In A.D. 169 Verus suddenly died, and Antoninus administered the state alone.

During the German wars Antoninus resided for three years on the Danube at Carnuntum. The Marcomanni were driven out of Pannonia and almost destroyed in their retreat across the Danube; and in A.D. 174 the emperor gained a great victory over the Quadi.

In A.D. 175, Avidius Cassius, a brave and skilful Roman commander who was at the head of the troops in Asia,

revolted and declared himself Augustus. But Cassius was assassinated by some of his officers, and so the rebellion came to an end. Antoninus showed his humanity by his treatment of the family and the partisans of Cassius; and his letter to the Senate, in which he recommends mercy, is extant.

Antoninus set out for the East on hearing of Cassius' revolt. Though he appears to have returned to Rome in A.D. 174, he went back to prosecute the war against the Germans, and it is probable that he marched direct to the East from the German war. His wife Faustina, who accompanied him into Asia, died suddenly at the foot of the Taurus, to the great grief of her husband. Capitolinus, who has written the life of Antoninus, and also Dion Cassius accuse the empress of scandalous infidelity to her husband and of abominable lewdness. But Capitolinus says that Antoninus either knew it not or pretended not to know it. Nothing is so common as such malicious reports in all ages, and the history of imperial Rome is full of them. Antoninus loved his wife, and he says that she was "obedient, affectionate, and simple." The same scandal had been spread about Faustina's mother, the wife of Antoninus Pius, and yet he too was perfectly satisfied with his wife. Antoninus Pius says after her death in a letter to Fronto that he would rather have lived in exile with his wife than in his palace at Rome without her. There are not many men who would give their wives a better character than these two emperors. Capitolinus wrote in the time of Diocletian. He may have intended to tell the truth, but he is a poor, feeble biographer. Dion Cassius, the most malignant of historians,

always reports and perhaps he believed any scandal against anybody.

Antoninus continued his journey to Syria and Egypt, and on his return to Italy through Athens he was initiated into the Eleusinian mysteries. It was the practice of the emperor to conform to the established rites of the age, and to perform religious ceremonies with due solemnity. We cannot conclude from this that he was a superstitious man, though we might perhaps do so if his book did not show that he was not. But this is only one among many instances that a ruler's public acts do not always prove his real opinions. A prudent governor will not roughly oppose even the superstitions of his people; and though he may wish that they were wiser, he will know that he cannot make them so by offending their prejudices.

Antoninus and his son Commodus entered Rome in triumph, perhaps for some German victories, A.D. 176. In the following year Commodus was associated with his father in the empire, and took the name of Augustus. This year A.D. 177 is memorable in ecclesiastical history. Attalus and others were put to death at Lyon for their adherence to the Christian religion. The evidence of this persecution is a letter preserved by Eusebius. It contains a very particular description of the tortures inflicted on the Christians in Gallia, and it states that while the persecution was going on, Attalus, a Christian and a Roman citizen, was loudly demanded by the populace and brought into the amphitheatre; but the governor ordered him to be reserved, with the rest who were in prison, until he had received instructions from the emperor. Many had been tortured

before the governor thought of applying to Antoninus. The imperial rescript, says the letter, was that the Christians should be punished, but if they would deny their faith, they must be released. On this the work began again. The Christians who were Roman citizens were beheaded; the rest were exposed to the wild beasts in the amphitheatre.

The war on the northern frontier appears to have been uninterrupted during the visit of Antoninus to the East, and on his return the emperor again left Rome to oppose the barbarians. The Germanic people were defeated in a great battle A.D. 179. During this campaign the emperor was seized with some contagious malady, of which he died in the camp, A.D. 180, in the fifty-ninth year of his age. His son Commodus was with him. The body, or the ashes probably, of the emperor were carried to Rome, and he received the honor of deification. Those who could afford it had his statue or bust; and when Capitolinus wrote, many people still had statues of Antoninus among the Dei Penates or household deities. He was in a manner made a saint. Commodus erected to the memory of his father the Antonine column which is now in the Piazza Colonna at Rome. The bassi rilievi which are placed in a spiral line round the shaft commemorate the victories of Antoninus over the Marcomanni and the Quadi, and the miraculous shower of rain which refreshed the Roman soldiers and discomfited their enemies. The statue of Antoninus was placed on the capital of the column, but it was removed at some time unknown, and a bronze statue of St. Paul was put in the place by Pope Sixtus the fifth.

In order to form a proper notion of the condition of the Christians under M. Antoninus we must go back to Trajan's time. When the younger Pliny was governor of Bithynia, the Christians were numerous in those parts, and the worshippers of the old religion were falling off. The temples were deserted, the festivals neglected, and there were no purchasers of victims for sacrifice. Those who were interested in the maintenance of the old religion thus found that their profits were in danger. Christians of both sexes and of all ages were brought before the governor, who did not know what to do with them. He could come to no other conclusion than this, that those who confessed to be Christians and persevered in their religion ought to be punished; if for nothing else, for their invincible obstinacy. He found no crimes proved against the Christians, and he could only characterize their religion as a depraved and extravagant superstition, which might be stopped if the people were allowed the opportunity of recanting. Pliny wrote this in a letter to Trajan. He asked for the emperor's directions, because he did not know what to do. He remarks that he had never been engaged in judicial inquiries about the Christians, and that accordingly he did not know what to inquire about or how far to inquire and punish. This proves that it was not a new thing to examine into a man's profession of Christianity and to punish him for it. Trajan's rescript is extant. He approved of the governor's judgment in the matter, but he said that no search must be made after the Christians; if a man was charged with the new religion and convicted, he must not be punished if he affirmed that he was not a Christian and confirmed his

denial by showing his reverence to the heathen gods. He added that no notice must be taken of anonymous informations, for such things were of bad example. Trajan was a mild and sensible man; and both motives of mercy and policy probably also induced him to take as little notice of the Christians as he could, to let them live in quiet if it were possible. Trajan's rescript is the first legislative act of the head of the Roman state with reference to Christianity, which is known to us. It does not appear that the Christians were further disturbed under his reign.

In the time of Hadrian it was no longer possible for the Roman government to overlook the great increase of the Christians and the hostility of the common sort to them. If the governors in the provinces were willing to let them alone, they could not resist the fanaticism of the heathen community, who looked on the Christians as atheists. The Jews too, who were settled all over the Roman Empire, were as hostile to the Christians as the Gentiles were. With the time of Hadrian begin the Christian Apologies, which show plainly what the popular feeling towards the Christians then was. A rescript of Hadrian to Minucius Fundanus, the Proconsul of Asia, which stands at the end of Justin's first Apology, instructs the governor that innocent people must not be troubled, and false accusers must not be allowed to extort money from them; the charges against the Christians must be made in due form, and no attention must be paid to popular clamors; when Christians were regularly prosecuted and convicted of illegal acts, they must be punished according to their deserts; and false accusers also must be punished. Antoninus Pius is said to have published rescripts

to the same effect. The terms of Hadrian's rescript seem very favorable to the Christians; but if we understand it in this sense, that they were only to be punished like other people for illegal acts, it would have had no meaning, for that could have been done without asking the emperor's advice. The real purpose of the rescript is that Christians must be punished if they persisted in their belief, and would not prove their renunciation of it by acknowledging the heathen religion.

In the time of M. Antoninus the opposition between the old and the new belief was still stronger, and the adherents of the heathen religion urged those in authority to a more regular resistance to the invasions of the Christian faith. Melito in his Apology to M. Antoninus represents the Christians of Asia as persecuted under new imperial orders. Shameless informers, he says, men who were greedy after the property of others, used these orders as a means of robbing those who were doing no harm. He doubts if a just emperor could have ordered anything so unjust; and if the last order was really not from the emperor, the Christians entreat him not to give them up to their enemies. We conclude from this that there were at least imperial rescripts or constitutions of M. Antoninus which were made the foundation of these persecutions. The fact of being a Christian was now a crime and punished, unless the accused denied their religion. Then come the persecutions at Smyrna, which some modern critics place in A.D. 167, ten years before the persecution of Lyon. The governors of the provinces under M. Antoninus might have found enough even in Trajan's rescript to warrant them in punishing

Christians, and the fanaticism of the people would drive them to persecution, even if they were unwilling. But besides the fact of the Christians rejecting all the heathen ceremonies, we must not forget that they plainly maintained that all the heathen religions were false. The Christians thus declared war against the heathen rites, and it is hardly necessary to observe that this was a declaration of hostility against the Roman government, which tolerated all the various forms of superstition that existed in the empire, and could not consistently tolerate another religion, which declared that all the rest were false and all the splendid ceremonies of the empire only a worship of devils.

If we had a true ecclesiastical history, we should know how the Roman emperors attempted to check the new religion; how they enforced their principle of finally punishing Christians, simply as Christians, which Justin in his Apology affirms that they did, and I have no doubt that he tells the truth; how far popular clamor and riots went in this matter, and how far many fanatical and ignorant Christians —for there were many such—contributed to excite the fanaticism on the other side and to imbitter the quarrel between the Roman government and the new religion. Our extant ecclesiastical histories are manifestly falsified, and what truth they contain is grossly exaggerated; but the fact is certain that in the time of M. Antoninus the heathen populations were in open hostility to the Christians, and that under Antoninus' rule men were put to death because they were Christians. Eusebius, in the preface to his fifth book, remarks that in the seventeenth year of Antoninus' reign, in some parts of the world, the persecution of the Christians

became more violent, and that it proceeded from the populace in the cities; and he adds, in his usual style of exaggeration, that we may infer from what took place in a single nation that myriads of martyrs were made in the habitable earth. The nation which he alludes to is Gallia; and he then proceeds to give the letter of the churches of Vienna and Lugdunum. It is probable that he has assigned the true cause of the persecutions, the fanaticism of the populace, and that both governors and emperor had a great deal of trouble with these disturbances. How far Marcus was cognizant of these cruel proceedings we do not know, for the historical records of his reign are very defective. He did not make the rule against the Christians, for Trajan did that; and if we admit that he would have been willing to let the Christians alone, we cannot affirm that it was in his power, for it would be a great mistake to suppose that Antoninus had the unlimited authority which some modern sovereigns have had. His power was limited by certain constitutional forms, by the Senate, and by the precedents of his predecessors. We cannot admit that such a man was an active persecutor, for there is no evidence that he was, though it is certain that he had no good opinion of the Christians, as appears from his own words. But he knew nothing of them except their hostility to the Roman religion, and he probably thought that they were dangerous to the state, notwithstanding the professions false or true of some of the Apologists. So much I have said, because it would be unfair not to state all that can be urged against a man whom his contemporaries and subsequent ages venerated as a model of virtue and benevolence. If I admitted the

genuineness of some documents, he would be altogether clear from the charge of even allowing any persecutions; but as I seek the truth and am sure that they are false, I leave him to bear whatever blame is his due. I add that it is quite certain that Antoninus did not derive any of his ethical principles from a religion of which he knew nothing.

There is no doubt that the Emperor's Reflections—or his Meditations, as they are generally named—is a genuine work. In the first book he speaks of himself, his family, and his teachers; and in other books he mentions himself.

It is plain that the emperor wrote down his thoughts or reflections as the occasions arose; and since they were intended for his own use, it is no improbable conjecture that he left a complete copy behind him written with his own hand; for it is not likely that so diligent a man would use the labor of a transcriber for such a purpose, and expose his most secret thoughts to any other eye. He may have also intended the book for his son Commodus, who however had no taste for his father's philosophy.

The last reflection of the Stoic philosophy that I have observed is in Simplicius' Commentary on the Enchiridion of Epictetus. Simplicius was not a Christian, and such a man was not likely to be converted at a time when Christianity was grossly corrupted. But he was a really religious man, and he concludes his commentary with a prayer to the Deity which no Christian could improve. From the time of Zeno to Simplicius, a period of about nine hundred years, the Stoic philosophy formed the characters of some of the best and greatest men. A man's greatness lies not in wealth and station, as the vulgar believe, nor yet in his intellectual