

The story of Marcus Aurelius [7]

Writing of Meditations and the death of Marcus

ELBERT HUBBARD



“Men and women do not get married because marriage is legal, nor do they continue living together because divorce is difficult.”

How Meditations came to be written

Every great book is an evolution: Marcus had been getting ready to write this immortal volume for nearly half a century. And now in his fifty-seventh year he found himself in the desert of Asia at the head of the army, endeavoring to put down an insurrection of various barbaric tribes.

Later, the seat of war was shifted to the north. The enemy struck and retreated, and danced around him as the Boers fought the English in South Africa. But Marcus Aurelius had time to think, and so with no books near and all memoranda far away, he began to write out his best thoughts.

At first he expressed just for his own satisfaction, but later, as the work progressed, we see that its value grew upon him, and it was his intention to put it in systematic form for posterity.

The death of Marcus Aurelius

And while working at this task, the exposures of field and camp, and the business of war, in which he had no heart, worked upon him so adversely that he sickened and died, aged fifty-nine.

His body was carried back to Rome and

placed by the side of that of his beloved adopted father, Antoninus Pius. And so he sleeps, but the precious legacy of the *Meditations*, written during those last two years of travel, turmoil and strife, is ours.

Memorable quotes

A few quotations seem in order:

- *Remember, on every occasion which leads thee to vexation, to apply this principle: not that this is a misfortune, but that to bear it nobly is good fortune.*
- *Things do not touch the soul, for they are eternal, and remain immovable; but our perturbations come only from the opinion which is within.... The Universe is transformation; life is opinion.*
- *To the jaundiced, honey tastes bitter; and to those bitten by mad dogs, water causes fear; and to little children, the ball is a fine thing. Why then am I angry?*
- *Dost thou think that a false opinion has less power than the bile in the jaundiced, or this the poison in him who is bitten by a mad dog?*
- *How easy it is to repel and to wipe away every impression which is troublesome and unsuitable, and immediately to be in all tranquillity!*

- *All things come from the universal Ruling Power, either directly or by way of consequence. And accordingly the lion's gaping jaws, and that which is poisonous, and every hurtful thing, as a thorn, as mud, are after-products of the grand and beautiful. Do not therefore imagine that they are of another kind from that which thou dost venerate, but form a just opinion of the source of all.*
- *Pass through the rest of life like one who has entrusted to the gods, with his whole soul, all that he has, making himself neither the tyrant nor the slave of any man.*
- *Never value anything as profitable to thyself which shall compel thee to break thy promise, to lose thy self-respect, to hate any man, to suspect, to curse, to act the hypocrite, to desire anything which needs walls and curtains.*
- *I am thankful to the gods that I was subjected to a ruler and a father who was able to take away all pride from me, and to bring me to the knowledge that it is possible for a man to live in a palace without wanting either guards or embroidered dresses, or torches and statues, and such-like show; but that it is in such a man's power to bring himself very near to the fashion of a private person, without being, for this reason, either meaner in thought or more remiss in action, with respect to the things which must be done for the public interest in a*

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Natural laws that follow the will of the governed (Contd.)

manner that befits a ruler.

- *What more dost thou want when thou hast done a man a service? Art thou not content that thou hast done something conformable to thy nature, and dost thou seek to be paid for it? Just as if the eye demanded a recompense for seeing, or the feet for walking. As a horse when he has run, a dog when he has traced the game, a bee when it has made the honey, so a man, when he has done a good act, does not call out for others to come and see, but goes on to another act, as a vine goes on to produce again the grapes in season.*
- *Accustom thyself to attend carefully to what is said by another, and as much as it is possible, be in the speaker's mind.*
- *Some things are hurrying into existence, and others are hurrying out of it; and of that which is coming into existence, part is already extinguished. Motions and changes are continually renewing the world, just as the uninterrupted course of time is always renewing the infinite duration of ages.*
- *Understand that every man is worth just so much as the things are worth about which he busies himself.*
- *Wickedness does no harm at all to the universe — it is only harmful to him who has it in his power to be released from it.*
- *Nothing is more wretched than a man who traverses everything in a round, and pries into the things beneath the earth, as the poet says, and seeks by conjecture what is in the minds of his neighbors, without perceiving that it is sufficient to attend to the deity within him, and to reverence it sincerely.*

The prayers of Marcus Aurelius to the gods are for one thing only — that their will be done.

- *All else is vain, all else is rebellion against the universe itself. Our form of worship should be like this: Everything harmonizes with me which is harmonious to thee, O Universe. Nothing for me is too early nor too late, which is in due time for thee. Everything is fruit to me which thy seasons bring, O Nature: from thee are all things, in thee are all things, to thee all things return.*
- *In the morning when thou risest unwillingly, let this thought be present — I am rising to the work of a human being. Why, then, am I dissatisfied if I am going to do the things for which I exist, and for which I was brought into the world? Or have I been made for this, to lie in the bedclothes and keep myself warm? But this is more pleasant. Dost thou exist, then, to take thy pleasure, and not for action or exertion? Dost thou not see the little plants, the little birds, the ants, the spiders, the bees, working together*

to put in order their several parts of the universe? And art thou unwilling to do the work of a human being, and dost thou not make haste to do that which is according to thy nature?

- *Judge every word and deed which are according to Nature to be fit for thee, and be not diverted by the blame which follows.... But if a thing is good to be done or said, do not consider it unworthy of thee.*
- *Since it is possible that thou mayest depart from life this very moment, regulate every act and thought accordingly.... Death certainly, and life, honor and dishonor, pain and pleasure, all these things equally happen to good men and bad, being things which make us neither better nor worse. Therefore they are neither good nor evil.*
- *To say all in a word, everything which belongs to the body is a stream, and what belongs to the soul is a dream and vapor; and life is a warfare, and a stranger's sojourn, and after fame is oblivion. What, then, is that which is able to enrich a man? One thing, and only one — philosophy. But this consists in keeping the guardian spirit within a man free from violence and unharmed, superior to pains and pleasures, doing nothing without a purpose, nor yet falsely, and with hypocrisy ... accepting all that happens and all that is allotted ... and finally waiting for death with a cheerful mind.*
- *If thou findest in human life anything better than justice, truth, temperance, fortitude, and, in a word, than thine own soul's satisfaction in the things which it enables thee to do according to right reason, and in the condition that is assigned to thee without thy own choice; if, I say, thou seest anything better than this, turn to it with all thy soul, and enjoy that which thou hast found to be the best. But ... if thou findest everything else smaller and of less value than this, give place to nothing else.... Simply and freely choose the better, and hold to it.*

- *Men seek retreats for themselves, houses in the country, seashores, and mountains; and thou too art wont to desire such things very much. But this is altogether a mark of the most common sort of men, for it is in thy power whenever thou shalt choose to retire into thyself. For nowhere either with more quiet or more freedom from trouble does a man retire than into his own soul, particularly when he has within him such thoughts that by looking into them he is immediately in perfect tranquillity — which is nothing else than the good ordering of the mind.*

- *Unhappy am I, because this has happened to me? Not so, but happy am I though this has happened to me, because I continue free from pain; neither crushed by the present nor fearing the future. Be cheerful, and seek no external help, nor the tranquillity which others give. A man must stand erect, not be kept*

erect by others. Be like the promontory against which the waves continually break, but it stands firm and tames the fury of the water around it. It is not fit that I should give myself pain, for I have never intentionally given pain even to another.



Elbert Hubbard was a renaissance man who was prominent around the early 20th Century. The *Story of Marcus Aurelius* is from his *Little Journeys to The Homes of The Great*, Vol. 8. To make it easier to read we have broken down long paragraphs into short ones and added subtitles. The text is unaltered.

REMEMBER
THE DATE!
OCTOBER 7, 2021
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2020