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[The greco-roman world - suite]

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are an old man, suffer this governing part of you no longer to be in bondage, no longer to be a puppet pulled by selfish impulse, no longer to be indignant with what is allotted in the present or to suspect what is allotted in the future."

Among these general exhortations and reflections which have to be repeated, there stands out the more intimate element—what Marcus Aurelius finds in self-communion is not always simply demands of morality (which he takes over mainly in the form in which he found them formulated, but often expresses clearly and powerfully in his own words), but also personal details. How often he asks himself whether he will not at last be for once no longer torn and soiled by the world and by passions, but good and innocent, dependable and good-natured and really unexacting, without desiring longer life and a more attractive place of residence and companions of his own way of thinking, satisfied and cheerfully accepting his lot! He, the emperor, says to himself that his cleverness is not so particularly great, but adds that in moral matters there is no way of excusing oneself, unless one can be content to be insensible to the promptings of the *hegemonikon*. He has moments in which he doubts his own genuine will; or, rather, his truthfulness toward himself brings to light these fits of vacillation, which are familiar to every man who strives after morality. "You yourself also often do wrong like others, and even if you do abstain from some kinds of wrong action, at all events, you have at least a proclivity to them, though cowardice or tenderness for your good name or some similar bad motive keeps you from offences like theirs" (XI, 18). Then again he powerfully sums up his consciousness of himself, and his ethical pantheism creates poetry: "I walk in Nature's way until I shall lie down and rest, breathing my last in this room from which I draw my daily breath, and lying down on this from which my father drew his vital seed, my mother her blood, my nurse her milk; from which for so many years I am fed and watered day by day; which bears my footsteps and my misusing it for so many purposes" (V, 4). In this way his mind often moves, as he assesses himself, confidently pressing forward from his vision of the divine whole, then stopping as he realizes the contrast between his moral state and the ideal aspired to. But he also firmly declares: "I do my duty; nothing in the world deters me therefrom."

He is able to give expression in reasoned form to resolutions and inner struggles, indeed to momentary impulses, because in

his clear mind those struggles are elevated to distinct consciousness only when he has overcome the difficulties by action, so that he can impress the stamp of reason on them. "Be not ashamed to accept help. You have the task of really carrying out that which is incumbent on you, like a soldier at the storming. What, then, if you have a lame leg and so cannot alone climb to the summits, but can do it with another's aid?"⁸⁷ In some reflections the particular situation is mentioned, as in the much-quoted apophthegm: "A spider is proud when he traps a fly, a man when he snares a leveret, another when he nets a sprat, another boars, another bears, another Sarmatian prisoners. If you test their sentiments, are they not bandits?" (X, 10). This has reference to his victory in the wars against the barbarian tribes on the northern frontier of the empire, and to the honorific title *Sarmaticus* that had been conferred on him. Often he assesses the influence of the external conditions in which destiny has placed him on his conduct in life: he exhorts himself to permit no one, not even himself, to hear him inveigh against the life at Court; humorously he proposes to treat philosophy and Court in the same way as mother and mother-in-law—that is, to take his ease with the former and so, by means of the resources of philosophy, to make himself endurable to the Court and the life at Court to himself. At one place he impresses on himself the fact that no one's situation in life is so "suited to philosophizing" as his own, or provides so much "material for duty" (in the Kantian phrase); if he is able to hold on to his true self in his imperial position he will be living as in the Isles of the Blest; otherwise he must "courageously depart to some corner" or abandon life altogether, in order then at least to have taken action. "Live as on a height; for here or there matters nothing, if everywhere one lives in the Universe as in a city. Let men see, let them study a true man, a man who lives in accord with Nature. If they cannot bear him, let them kill him, for it were better so than for him to live on those terms" (X, 15).

In his solitude as ruler he feels the value of human relations. He has to convince himself again and again that all human opinions, men's praise and blame, are immaterial and valueless, that nothing can move the will that is steadfast; and we can see how when confronted with such opinions he tries with various successive considerations, rising from the personal point of view to abstract principles, to get rid of the "I am hurt."* He

* See especially IV, 6 sqq.

