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## [The greco-roman world - suite]

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truth in what you mean and say" (II, 17; VIII, 45, etc.). He had demanded of himself that he should give up his imperial office, and, indeed, life itself, "simply and in freedom and reverence", if he were unable to preserve himself unstained and were only to vegetate "like half-devoured combatants in the arena, a mass of wounds and dusty blood, yet imploring to be kept alive until the morrow, only to be exposed in that state to the same teeth and claws" (X, 8, 2). He would rather be killed than come down from "the life on a height" (X, 14, 15). But in cultivating his *dæmon* not only in self-communion and solitude but in his relations with the world, he succeeded in maintaining the moral height to which he aspired, as a spiritual attitude which had become habitual with him. Thus the *dæmon* reveals itself in his aliveness to human relationships while filled with a pantheistic sense of the universe. And here is to be found the most personal element in this truly human document.

Yet, how many problems lie in this man! A man in that outward situation in which all the good things of this world, indeed, all the highest values of Roman existence, were present; and who was not born as heir to the throne, but had been raised from middle-class circumstances, from the middle class that had become an aristocracy, to the throne. As a six-year-old boy he had been envisaged by Hadrian, that very active ruler, as heir to the throne—on account of his purity of character: he was the son of Lucius Verus, and the emperor jestingly called him *Verissimus* ("Most Truthful").

The Roman State was not at this time a hereditary monarchy. The succession to the throne was determined by the ruler's obligation to adopt as a son the "best" among the most suitable to inherit that state; this principle involved the emperor's renunciation of a successor from his own family. Thus Hadrian had selected the young Marcus, as the "best", to be a future ruler; Hadrian had seen to the boy's education for that high state, and when he adopted Antoninus Pius (A.D. 138) as his successor he bound him to adopt Marcus, then seventeen years old, as his son. Thanks to this choice it could be hoped that the conditions were fulfilled which Plato postulated for the ending of political bankruptcy and therewith the salvation of mankind in this world—a philosopher on the imperial throne! For the Roman Empire the rule of Marcus Antoninus did indeed bring a happy period; but it was the end of the rare epoch of internal peace and prosperity, lasting nearly a century, which had begun

with Trajan. After the death of Marcus began the decline of the Roman Empire. The decline is associated with the name of Commodus, who was the son born of Marcus's marriage with Faustina, the daughter of his adoptive father Antoninus Pius. Marcus had considered him worthy of the succession. It was a fatal choice. No new era began in world history with this philosopher-king, as Plato had dreamt. Marcus Antoninus himself had no ambition to be a reformer of State and society. A Roman emperor with the boundless power of those rulers of the world, he found in the arena of world history not the heroism of the man of action, but the "heroic truth" of fulfilment of duty, which he pursued in his life with the energy of conviction. As a statesman and army commander he was successful, but he gained his successes slowly and with great effort, until, in the midst of his work for the safeguarding of the expansion of the empire, he was overtaken by death in Vienna, when not yet sixty years of age.

He had hated war, but had been compelled to spend fourteen out of the nineteen years of his rule at army headquarters, in Bohemia, on the northern frontier of the empire, owing to the dangerous incursions of the Germanic and Sarmatian barbarians. The danger was one which could only be averted at the cost of the utmost exertion of his own strength and of that of the empire. Earlier, in the very year of his accession, the Parthian war (161-6) had broken out; it had been pursued to a successful end by the commander of his armies, Avidius Cassius, but it had been followed by the spread of a frightful plague in Italy, which lasted for decades and decimated the population, and was one of the causes of the fall of the Roman Empire.

In addition to this came trouble in his immediate entourage. Lucius Aurelius Verus, his adoptive brother, whom he had made a partner in his rule, turned out a profligate. Commodus, his son (born in 161), on whom he so counted that he assured the succession to him when he was a youth of sixteen, was to become a second Nero. Was Marcus so biased in favour of his son that he secured his election by the Senate (in 177) instead of following the well-tryed principle of the adoption of "the best"? Was he so mistaken in him that he thought him the best, or did he want, as some historians have thought, to establish the dynastic system and found a hereditary monarchy in the Roman Empire? Some modern writers have explained the fatal choice as due to his philosophic principles: as in his attitude to marriage he

