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[The greco-roman world - suite]

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also see plainly the difference between the two, due to the emperor's predominant interest in the formation of character as compared with intellectual progress. We have here the first document of the ethical and political type of autobiography, which attained a sort of perfection in modern times in the *Life of Lord Clarendon* with its famous portraits of the friends of his youth, by whose company and conversation, as he declares, he "mended his understanding and formed his studies and manners."⁹⁴

Compared with that brilliant series of literary portraits of members of the English aristocracy of the seventeenth century, the character-sketches in the book which the Roman emperor addressed "to himself" are but small beginnings, with no literary pretensions, but for the very reason that they are free from elaboration their value as a human document is increased. We can see here actually at work the spiritual process of recollection that underlies autobiography as Marcus sets down one after the other, with no ulterior purpose and without any systematic arrangement, the various traits of the different persons he describes. He does it all in the most natural way. Thus, for instance, in his recollection of Rusticus he does not merely exhaust the theme offered by the Stoic concern with the formation of character and the distinction between philosophy and rhetoric, but mentions in that connexion that he had learnt from Rusticus "to write letters in a simple manner", and adds, "Like his own from Sinuessa to my mother". Rusticus sent him to the "Dissertations" of Epictetus. He mentions that at the end, and adds that his friend passed to him his own copy of the book. On the other hand, he makes no mention of the fact that Rusticus held an important position in political life, had twice been Consul, and had been made by him, the emperor, Prefect of Rome. So entirely is the recollection concentrated on spiritual relations in life.

These reminiscences of teachers and friends retain the advantage of unelaborated testimony even when the sketches grow into a full picture, as in the case of the last of the series, the portrait of Antoninus Pius. In its outward form this consists of some 100 adjectives; there seems to be an inexhaustible flow of descriptions of the emperor's exemplary traits as man and ruler: the recollections extend to the smallest details of his habits in daily life, as though Marcus could not do enough in the praise of that "entire man".

The reminiscences begin:

From my father: gentleness and unshaken resolution in judgments taken after full examination: no vainglory about external honours; love of work and perseverance; readiness to hear those who had anything to contribute to the public advantage; the desire to reward every man according to desert without partiality; the experience that knew where to tighten the rein, where to relax.

This description of the ideal type of the enlightened monarch is followed by a sketch of court life, which Antoninus Pius reformed by relaxing the strict etiquette but introducing stern measures against perverted practices. Then the meditator returns to the picture of the ruler to add details of more concrete character:

Exact scrutiny in council, and patience; not that he was avoiding investigation, satisfied with first impressions. An inclination to keep his friends, and nowhere fastidious or the victim of manias but his own master in everything, and his outward mien cheerful. His long foresight and ordering of the merest trifle without making scenes. The check in his reign put upon organized applause and every form of lip-service; his unceasing watch over the needs of the empire and his stewardship of its resources; his patience under criticism of such conduct by individuals.

After this comes the emperor's enlightened religious attitude: "No superstitious fear of divine powers." That point was of importance at the time; Marcus laid stress on it in his account of his own education; he thanks one of his masters for teaching him in his youth "to disbelieve the professions of sorcerers and impostors about incantations and exorcism of spirits and the like" (I, 6). This is followed by the monarch's appearance in public: no angling for popular favour, no itch for innovation, but moderation; and similarly in the enjoyment of the external benefits in life. His summing up is that the emperor was "a ripe man, an entire man, above flattery, able to preside over his own and his subjects' business".

There follows—so far as the succession of reminiscences can be analysed—Antoninus' attitude to the contemporary representatives of cultural life, the philosophers, writers, and jurists; Marcus emphasizes his predecessor's sound judgment in distinguishing the genuine from the false and his generous recognition of others' services. He recalls also the monarch's general human qualities, such as affability, and at the same time his sensible attitude in regard to the care of health. Then he dwells once more on the conservative tendency of the policy of Antoninus Pius and, the other main point, his sense of duty regardless of popularity. Here again comes an intimate personal trait:

