

BOOK ONE



1. From my grandfather Verus I learned good morals and freedom from anger.

2. From the reputation and memory of my father, modesty and a manly character.

3. From my mother, piety and kindness, and abstinence, not only from evil deeds, but even from evil thoughts; and further, simplicity in my way of living, far removed from the habits of the rich.

4. From my great-grandfather, not to have frequented public schools, and to have had good teachers at home, and to know that on such things a man should spend liberally.

5. From my tutor, to be neither of the green nor of the blue party at the games in the Circus, nor a partisan either of the Parmularius or the Scutarius at the gladiators' fights. I also learned endurance of labour from him, and to have few wants, and to work with my own hands, and not to meddle with other people's affairs, and to be unwilling to listen to slander.

6. From Diognetus, not to busy myself with trivial things, and not to give credit to what was said by miracle-workers and charlatans about incantations and the exorcism of demons and such things; and not to breed quails for fighting, nor to give myself up passionately to such things; and to endure freedom of speech; and to have become intimate with philosophy; and to attend the lectures, first of Bacchius, then of Tandasis and

 MEDITATIONS

Marcianus; and to have written dialogues in my youth; and to have desired a plank bed with an animal skin cover, and whatever else of the kind belongs to the Grecian discipline.

7. From Rusticus I received the impression that my character required improvement and therapy; and from him I learned not to be led astray into the emulation of Sophists, nor to write on speculative matters, nor to deliver little moralizing speeches, nor to showing off as a man who practises much discipline, or to perform benevolent acts in order to make a display; and to abstain from rhetoric, and poetry, and fine writing; and not to walk about in the house in my ceremonial attire, nor to do other things of the kind; and to write my letters with simplicity, like the letter which Rusticus wrote from Sinuessa to my mother; and with respect to those who have offended me by words, or done me wrong, to be easily disposed to be pacified and reconciled, as soon as they have shown a readiness to be reconciled; and to read carefully, and not to be satisfied with a superficial understanding of a book; nor hastily to give my assent to those who talk overmuch; and I am indebted to him for being acquainted with the discourses of Epictetus, which he communicated to me out of his own collection.

8. From Apollonius I learned freedom of will and undeviating steadiness of purpose; and to look to nothing else, not even for a moment, except to reason; and to be always the same, in sharp pains, on the occasion of the loss of a child, and in long illness; and to see clearly in a living example that the same man can be both most resolute and yielding, and not irritable in giving instruction; and to have had before my eyes a man who clearly considered his experience and his skill in

BOOK ONE

expounding philosophical principles as the least of his merits; and from him I learned how to receive what are considered favours from friends, without being either humbled by them or letting them pass unnoticed.

9. From Sextus, a benevolent disposition, and the example of a family governed in a fatherly manner, and the idea of living conformably to nature; and gravity without affectation, and to look carefully after the interests of friends, and to tolerate ignorant persons, and those who form opinions without consideration: he had the power of readily accommodating himself to all, so that conversation with him was more agreeable than any flattery; and at the same time he was most highly venerated by those who associated with him: and he had the ability both to discover and organize, in an intelligent and methodical way, the principles necessary for life; and he never showed anger or any other passion, but was entirely free from passion, and also most affectionate; and he could express approval without noisy display, and he possessed much knowledge without calling attention to it.

10. From Alexander the grammarian, to refrain from fault-finding, and not to correct or reproach those who uttered any barbarous or strange-sounding expression or solecism; but adeptly to introduce the very expression which ought to have been used, while replying or giving confirmation, or engaging in an inquiry about the topic itself rather than the word, or by some other tactful means of suggestion.

11. From Fronto I learned to observe what envy, and duplicity, and hypocrisy are in a tyrant, and that generally those among us who are called Patricians are rather deficient in paternal affection.

 MEDITATIONS

12. From Alexander the Platonist, not to say to anyone frequently or without necessity, or to write in a letter, that I have no time to spare; nor continually to excuse the neglect of duties required by our relation to those with whom we live, by claiming to have more urgent business.

13. From Catulus, not to be indifferent when a friend finds fault, even if he should find fault without reason, but to try to restore him to his usual disposition; and to be ready to speak well of teachers, as it is reported of Domitius and Athenodotus; and to love my children truly.

14. From my “brother” Severus, to love my kin, and to love truth, and to love justice; and through him I learned to know Thrasea, Helvidius, Cato, Dio, Brutus; and from him I received the idea of a political state in which there is the same law for all, one administered with regard to equal rights and equal freedom of speech, and the idea of a kingly government which respects most of all the freedom of the governed; I learned from him also consistency and undeviating steadiness in my regard for philosophy; and a disposition to do good, and to give to others readily, and to cherish good hopes, and to believe that I am loved by my friends; and in him I observed no attempt to conceal his opinions with respect to those of whom he disapproved, and that his friends had no need to speculate about what he wished or did not wish, but it was quite plain.

15. From Maximus I learned self-mastery, and not to be led aside by anything; and cheerfulness in all circumstances, as well as in illness; and a good mixture in of gentleness and dignity in one’s character, and to do what was set before me without complaining. I noticed that everybody believed that what he said was what he thought, and that in all that he did he

BOOK ONE

never had any bad intention; and he never showed amazement and surprise, and was never in a hurry, and never put off doing a thing, nor was perplexed nor dejected, nor did he ever laugh to disguise his vexation, nor, on the other hand, was he ever passionate or suspicious. He was accustomed to perform acts of kindness, and was ready to forgive, and was free from all falsehood; and he gave the appearance of a man who could not be diverted from the right path rather than of a man who had to be set right by others. I observed, too, that no man could ever think that he was looked down upon by Maximus, or ever venture to think himself a better man. He had also the art of being humorous in an agreeable way.

16. In my [adoptive] father [the emperor Antoninus Pius] I observed mildness of temper, and unchangeable resolution in the things which he had determined after due deliberation; and no vanity regarding those things which men call honours; and a love of hard work and perseverance; and readiness to listen to those who had anything to propose for the common good; and undeviating firmness in giving to every man according to his deserts; and knowing from experience when to undertake action vigorously and when to relax. And I observed that he had overcome all passion for boys; and he considered himself no more than any other citizen; and he released his friends from all obligation to dine with him or to attend him when he travelled, and those who had failed to accompany him, by reason of any urgent circumstances, always found him the same. I also observed his habit of careful inquiry in all matters of deliberation, and his persistence, and that he never stopped his investigation through being satisfied with appearances which first present themselves; and that his

 MEDITATIONS

disposition was to keep his friends, and not to become quickly tired of them, nor to be extravagant in his displays of affection; and to be satisfied on all occasions, and cheerful; and to anticipate events in the distant future, and to provide for the smallest without display; and immediately to put a stop to popular applause and all flattery; and to be constantly watchful over the things which were necessary for the administration of the empire, and to be a good manager of public expenditure, and patiently to endure the blame which he got for such conduct; and he was neither superstitious with respect to the gods, nor did he court men by gifts or by trying to please them, or by flattering the populace; but he showed sobriety in all things and firmness, and never any mean thoughts or action, nor love of novelty for its own sake. And the things which contributed in any way to life's comfort, and of which fortune gives an abundant supply, he used without arrogance and without apology; so that when he had them, he enjoyed them without affectation, and when he did not have them, he did not desire them. No one could ever say of him that he was either a Sophist or servile or a pedant; but everyone acknowledged him to be a man of maturity and accomplishment, above flattery, able to manage his own and other men's affairs. Besides this, he honoured those who were true philosophers, and he did not reproach those who pretended to be philosophers, nor yet was he easily led by them. He was also natural in conversation, and he made himself agreeable without any offensive affectation. He took appropriate care of his body's health, not like one who is overly-attached to life, nor out of personal vanity, nor yet in a careless way, but so that, through his own attention, he very seldom stood in need of the aid of physicians or of medicine or

BOOK ONE

external treatment. He was most ready to give way without envy to those who possessed any particular ability, such as that of eloquence or knowledge of the law or of morals, or of anything else; and he gave them his help, so that each might enjoy reputation according to his deserts; and he always respected the institutions of his country, without any affectation of doing so. Further, he was not fond of change nor unsteady, but he loved to stay in the same places, and to engage himself in the same activities; and after being seized by his headaches he came back immediately fresh and vigorous to his usual occupations. His secrets were very few and exceptional, and only about public matters; and he showed prudence and economy in the exhibition of public spectacles and the construction of public buildings, his donations to the people, and in such things, for he was a man who looked to what ought to be done, not to the reputation which is obtained by one's acts. He did not bathe at inappropriate hours; he was not fond of constructing buildings, nor fussy about what he ate, nor about the texture and colour of his clothes, nor about the beauty of his slaves. His clothing came from Lorium, his villa on the coast, and from Lanuvium generally. We know how he behaved to the toll-collector at Tusculum who asked his pardon; and such was his behaviour in general. There was in him nothing harsh, nor implacable, nor violent, nor, as one may say, anything carried to the sweating point; but he examined all things individually, as if he had plenty of time, and without confusion, in a methodical way, vigorously and consistently. And that might be said of him which is recorded of Socrates, that he was able both to abstain from, and to enjoy, those things which many are too weak to abstain from, and cannot enjoy without excess. But to

 MEDITATIONS

be strong enough both to bear the one and to be sober in the other is the mark of a man who has a perfect and invincible soul, such as he showed in the illness of Maximus.

17. To the gods I am indebted for having good grandfathers, good parents, a good sister, good teachers, good associates, good kinsmen and friends, nearly everything good. Further, I owe it to the gods that I did not rush into any offence against any of them, though I had a tendency which, if the opportunity had arisen, might have led me to do something of this kind; but, through their favour, there never was a set of circumstances which might put me to the test. Further, I am thankful to the gods that I was not brought up with my grandfather's concubine any longer than I was, and that I preserved the flower of my youth, and that I did not prove my virility before the proper age, but even deferred the time; that I was subjected to a ruler and a father who was able to take away all conceit from me, and to help me to realize that it is possible for a man to live in a palace without wanting either guards or fancy clothing, or torches and statues, and such things for show; but that it is in such a man's power to bring himself very close to the lifestyle of a private citizen, 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 manner that befits a ruler. I thank the gods for giving me such [an adoptive] brother [Lucius Verus], who was able by his moral character to rouse me to vigilance over myself, and who, at the same time, pleased me by his respect and affection; that my children have not been slow nor physically deformed; that I did not become more proficient in rhetoric, poetry, and the

BOOK ONE

other studies, in which I should perhaps have been completely engaged if I had seen that I was making progress; that I made haste to place those [teachers] who brought me up in positions of honour, which they seemed to desire, without putting them off with hope of my doing it some time after, because they were then still young; that I knew Apollonius, Rusticus, Maximus; that I received clear and frequent impressions about living according to nature, and what kind of a life that is, so that, so far as depended on the gods, and their gifts, and help, and inspirations, nothing hindered me from forthwith living according to nature, though I still fall short of it through my own fault, and through not observing the admonitions of the gods, and, I may almost say, their direct instructions; that my body has held out so long in such a kind of life; that I never touched either Benedicta or Theodotus, and that, after having fallen into lustful passions, I was cured; and, though I was often irritated with Rusticus, I never did anything of which I needed to repent; that, though it was my mother's fate to die young, she spent the last years of her life with me; that, whenever I wished to help any man in his need, or on any other occasion, I was never told that I had not the means of doing it; and that I never found myself needing to receive such assistance from another; that I have such a wife, so obedient, and so affectionate, and so straightforward; that I had abundance of good tutors for my children; and that remedies have been shown to me by dreams, both others, and against spitting blood and giddiness...; and that, when I had an inclination to philosophy, I did not fall into the hands of any Sophist, and that I did not waste my time on writers of histories, or in resolving logical

 MEDITATIONS

sylogisms, or occupy myself about the investigation of appearances in the heavens; for all these things require the help of the gods and fortune.

Among the Quadi at the River Granua.

