

George Lang, Marcus Aurelius



*The
Philosophy
of Marcus
Aurelius*

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH OF MARCUS AURELIUS ANTONINUS.

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M. Antoninus was born at Rome, A.D. 121, on the 26th of April. His father, Annius Verus, died while he was praetor. His mother was Domitia Calvilla, also named Lucilla. The Emperor T. Antoninus Pius married Annia Galeria Faustina, the sister of Annius Verus, and was consequently the uncle of M. Antoninus. When Hadrian adopted Antoninus Pius and declared him his successor in the empire, Antoninus Pius adopted both L. Ceionius Commodus, the son of Aelius Caesar, and M. Antoninus, whose original name was M. Annius Verus. Antoninus then took the name of M. Aelius Aurelius Verus, to which was added the title of Caesar in A.D. 139: the name Aelius belonged to Hadrian's family, and Aurelius was the name of Antoninus Pius. When M. Antoninus became Augustus, he dropped the name of Verus and took the name of Antoninus. Accordingly he is generally named M. Aurelius Antoninus, or simply M. Antoninus.

The youth was most carefully brought up. He thanks the gods ([i. 17](#)) that he had good grandfathers, good parents, a good sister, good teachers, good associates, good kinsmen and friends, nearly everything good. He had the happy fortune to witness the example of his uncle and adoptive father Antoninus Pius, and he has recorded in his word ([i. 16](#); [vi. 30](#)) the virtues of the excellent man and prudent ruler. Like many young Romans he tried his hand at poetry and studied rhetoric. Herodes Atticus and M. Cornelius Fronto were his teachers in eloquence. There are extant

letters between Fronto and Marcus,^[A] which show the great affection of the pupil for the master, and the master's great hopes of his industrious pupil. M. Antoninus mentions Fronto (i. 11) among those to whom he was indebted for his education.

[A] M. Cornelii Frontonis Reliquiae, Berlin, 1816. There are a few letters between Fronto and Antoninus Pius.

When he was eleven years old, he assumed the dress of philosophers, something plain and coarse, became a hard student, and lived a most laborious, abstemious life, even so far as to injure his health. Finally, he abandoned poetry and rhetoric for philosophy, and he attached himself to the sect of the Stoics. But he did not neglect the study of law, which was a useful preparation for the high place which he was designed to fill. His teacher was L. Volusianus Maecianus, a distinguished jurist. We must suppose that he learned the Roman discipline of arms, which was a necessary part of the education of a man who afterwards led his troops to battle against a warlike race.

Antoninus has recorded in his first book the names of his teachers, and the obligations which he owed to each of them. The way in which he speaks of what he learned from them might seem to savor of vanity or self-praise, if we look carelessly at the way in which he has expressed himself; but if any one draws this conclusion, he will be mistaken. Antoninus means to commemorate the merits of his several teachers, what they taught, and what a pupil might learn from them. Besides, this book, like the eleven other books, was for his own use; and if we may trust the note at the end of the first book, it was written during one of M. Antoninus' campaigns against the Quadi, at a time when the commemoration of the virtues of his illustrious teachers might remind him of their lessons and the practical uses which he might derive from them.

Among his teachers of philosophy was Sextus of Chaeroneia, a grandson of Plutarch. What he learned from this excellent man is told by himself (i. 9). His favorite teacher was Q. Junius Rusticus (i. 7), a philosopher, and also a man of practical good sense in public affairs. Rusticus was the adviser of Antoninus after he became emperor. Young men who are destined for high places are not often fortunate in those who are about them, their companions and teachers; and I do not know any example of a young prince having had an education which can be compared with that of M. Antoninus. Such a body of teachers distinguished by their acquirements and their character will hardly be collected again; and as to the pupil, we have not had one like him since.

Hadrian died in July A.D. 138, and was succeeded by Antoninus Pius. M. Antoninus married Faustina, his cousin, the daughter of Pius, probably about A.D. 146, for he had a daughter born in 147. He received from his adoptive father the title of Caesar, and was associated with him in the administration of the state. The father and the adopted son lived together in perfect friendship and confidence. Antoninus was a dutiful son, and the emperor Pius loved and esteemed him.

Antoninus Pius died in March, A.D. 161. The Senate, it is said, urged M. Antoninus to take the sole administration of the empire, but he associated with himself the other adopted son of Pius, L. Ceionius Commodus, who is generally called L. Verus. Thus Rome for the first time had two emperors. Verus was an indolent man of pleasure, and unworthy of his station. Antoninus however bore with him, and it is said Verus had sense enough to pay to his colleague the respect due to his character. A virtuous emperor and a loose partner lived together in peace, and

their alliance was strengthened by Antoninus giving to Verus for wife his daughter Lucilla.

The reign of Antoninus was first troubled by a Parthian war, in which Verus was sent to command; but he did nothing, and the success that was obtained by the Romans in Armenia and on the Euphrates and Tigris was due to his generals. This Parthian war ended in A.D. 165. Aurelius and Verus had a triumph (A.D. 166) for the victories in the East. A pestilence followed, which carried off great numbers in Rome and Italy, and spread to the west of Europe.

The north of Italy was also threatened by the rude people beyond the Alps, from the borders of Gallia to the eastern side of the Hadriatic. These barbarians attempted to break into Italy, as the Germanic nations had attempted near three hundred years before; and the rest of the life of Antoninus, with some intervals, was employed in driving back the invaders. In 169 Verus suddenly died, and Antoninus administered the state alone.

During the German wars Antoninus resided for three years on the Danube at Carnuntum. The Marcomanni were driven out of Pannonia and almost destroyed in their retreat across the Danube; and in A.D. 174 the emperor gained a great victory over the Quadi.

In A.D. 175, Avidius Cassius, a brave and skilful Roman commander who was at the head of the troops in Asia, revolted, and declared himself Augustus. But Cassius was assassinated by some of his officers, and so the rebellion came to an end. Antoninus showed his humanity by his treatment of the family and the partisans of Cassius; and his letter to the Senate, in which he recommends mercy, is extant. (Vulcatius, Avidius Cassius, c. 12.)

Antoninus set out for the East on hearing of Cassius' revolt. Though he appears to have returned to Rome in A.D. 174, he went back to prosecute the war against the Germans, and it is probable that he marched direct to the East from the German war. His wife Faustina, who accompanied him into Asia, died suddenly at the foot of the Taurus, to the great grief of her husband. Capitolinus, who has written the life of Antoninus, and also Dion Cassius, accuses the empress of scandalous infidelity to her husband, and of abominable lewdness. But Capitolinus says that Antoninus either knew it not or pretended not to know it. Nothing is so common as such malicious reports in all ages, and the history of imperial Rome is full of them. Antoninus loved his wife, and he says that she was "obedient, affectionate, and simple." The same scandal had been spread about Faustina's mother, the wife of Antoninus Pius, and yet he too was perfectly satisfied with his wife. Antoninus Pius says after her death, in a letter to Fronto, that he would rather have lived in exile with his wife than in his palace at Rome without her. There are not many men who would give their wives a better character than these two emperors. Capitolinus wrote in the time of Diocletian. He may have intended to tell the truth, but he is a poor, feeble biographer. Dion Cassius, the most malignant of historians, always reports, and perhaps he believed, any scandal against anybody.

Antoninus continued his journey to Syria and Egypt, and on his return to Italy through Athens he was initiated into the Eleusinian mysteries. It was the practice of the emperor to conform to the established rites of the age, and to perform religious ceremonies with due solemnity. We cannot conclude from this that he was a superstitious man, though we might perhaps do so if his book did not show that he was not. But that is only one among many instances that a ruler's public acts do not always prove his real opinions. A

prudent governor will not roughly oppose even the superstitions of his people; and though he may wish they were wiser, he will know that he cannot make them so by offending their prejudices.

Antoninus and his son Commodus entered Rome in triumph, perhaps for some German victories, on the 23d. of December, A.D. 176. In the following year Commodus was associated with his father in the empire, and took the name of Augustus. This year A.D. 177 is memorable in ecclesiastical history. Attalus and others were put to death at Lyon for their adherence to the Christian religion. The evidence of this persecution is a letter preserved by Eusebius (E.H. V. I; printed in Routh's *Reliquiae Sacrae*, vol. i, with notes). The letter is from the Christians of Vienna and Lugdunum in Gallia (Vienna and Lyon) to their Christian brethren in Asia and Phrygia; and it is preserved perhaps nearly entire. It contains a very particular description of the tortures inflicted on the Christians in Gallia, and it states that while the persecution was going on, Attalus, a Christian and a Roman citizen, was loudly demanded by the populace and brought into the amphitheatre; but the governor ordered him to be reserved, with the rest who were in prison, until he had received instructions from the emperor. Many had been tortured before the governor thought of applying to Antoninus. The imperial rescript, says the letter, was that the Christians should be punished, but if they would deny their faith, they must be released. On this the work began again. The Christians who were Roman citizens were beheaded; the rest were exposed to the wild beasts in the amphitheatre. Some modern writers on ecclesiastical history, when they use this letter, say nothing of the wonderful stories of the martyrs' sufferings. Sanctus, as the letter says, was burnt with plates of hot iron till his body was one sore and had lost all human form; but on being put to the rack he recovered his former appearance under the

torture, which was thus a cure instead of a punishment. He was afterwards torn by beasts, and placed on an iron chair and roasted. He died at last.

The letter is one piece of evidence. The writer, whoever he was that wrote in the name of the Gallic Christians, is our evidence both for the ordinary and the extraordinary circumstances of the story, and we cannot accept his evidence for one part and reject the other. We often receive small evidence as a proof of a thing we believe to be within the limits of probability or possibility, and we reject exactly the same evidence, when the thing to which it refers appears very improbable or impossible. But this is a false method of inquiry, though it is followed by some modern writers, who select what they like from a story and reject the rest of the evidence; or if they do not reject it, they dishonestly suppress it. A man can only act consistently by accepting all this letter or rejecting it all, and we cannot blame him for either. But he who rejects it may still admit that such a letter may be founded on real facts; and he would make this admission as the most probable way of accounting for the existence of the letter; but if, as he would suppose, the writer has stated some things falsely, he cannot tell what part of his story is worthy of credit.

The war on the northern frontier appears to have been uninterrupted during the visit of Antoninus to the East, and on his return the emperor again left Rome to oppose the barbarians. The Germanic people were defeated in a great battle A.D. 179. During this campaign the emperor was seized with some contagious malady, of which he died in the camp at Sirmium (Mitrovitz), on the Save, in Lower Pannonia, but at Vindebona (Vienna), according to other authorities, on the 17th of March, A.D. 180, in the fifty-ninth year of his age. His son Commodus was with him. The body, or the ashes probably, of the emperor were carried to Rome,

and he received the honor of deification. Those who could afford it had his statue or bust; and when Capitolinus wrote, many people still had statues of Antoninus among the Dei Penates or household deities. He was in a manner made a saint. Commodus erected to the memory of his father the Antonine column which is now in the Piazza Colonna at Rome. The *bassi rilievi* which are placed in a spiral line round the shaft commemorate the victories of Antoninus over the Marcomanni and the Quadi, and the miraculous shower of rain which refreshed the Roman soldiers and discomfited their enemies. The statue of Antoninus was placed on the capital of the column, but it was removed at some time unknown, and a bronze statue of St. Paul was put in the place by Pope Sixtus the fifth.

The historical evidence for the times of Antoninus is very defective, and some of that which remains is not credible. The most curious is the story about the miracle which happened in A.D. 174, during the war with the Quadi. The Roman army was in danger of perishing by thirst, but a sudden storm drenched them with rain, while it discharged fire and hail on their enemies, and the Romans gained a great victory. All the authorities which speak of the battle speak also of the miracle. The Gentile writers assign it to their gods, and the Christians to the intercession of the Christian legion in the emperor's army. To confirm the Christian statement it is added that the emperor gave the title of Thundering to this legion; but Dacier and others, who maintain the Christian report of the miracle, admit that this title of Thundering or Lightning was not given to this legion because the Quadi were struck with lightning, but because there was a figure of lightning on their shields, and that this title of the legion existed in the time of Augustus. Scaliger also had observed that the legion was called Thundering (κεραυνοβόλος or κεραυνοφόρος) before the reign of Antoninus. We learn this from Dion Cassius (Lib. 55, c. 23,

and the note of Reimarus), who enumerates all the legions of Augustus' time. The name Thundering of Lightning also occurs on an inscription of the reign of Trajan, which was found at Trieste. Eusebius (v. 5), when he relates the miracle, quotes Apolinarius, bishop of Hierapolis, as authority for this name being given to the legion Melitene by the emperor in consequence of the success which he obtained through their prayers; from which we may estimate the value of Apolinarius' testimony. Eusebius does not say in what book of Apolinarius the statement occurs. Dion says that the Thundering legion was stationed in Cappadocia in the time of Augustus. Valesius also observes that in the Notitia of the Imperium Romanum there is mentioned under the commander of Armenia the Praefectura of the twelfth legion named "Thundering Melitene;" and this position in Armenia will agree with what Dion says of its position in Cappadocia. Accordingly Valesius concludes that Melitene was not the name of the legion, but of the town in which it was stationed. Melitene was also the name of the district in which this town was situated. The legions did not, he says, take their name from the place where they were on duty, but from the country in which they were raised, and therefore what Eusebius says about the Melitene does not seem probable to him. Yet Valesius, on the authority of Apolinarius and Tertullian, believed that the miracle was worked through the prayers of the Christian soldiers in the emperor's army. Rufinus does not give the name of Melitene to this legion, says Valesius, and probably he purposely omitted it, because he knew that Melitene was the name of a town in Armenia Minor, where the legion was stationed in his time.

The emperor, it is said, made a report of his victory to the Senate, which we may believe, for such was the practice; but we do not know what he said in his letter, for it is not extant. Dacier assumes that the emperor's letter was

purposely destroyed by the Senate or the enemies of Christianity, that so honorable a testimony to the Christians and their religion might not be perpetuated. The critic has however not seen that he contradicts himself when he tells us the purport of the letter, for he says that it was destroyed, and even Eusebius could not find it. But there does exist a letter in Greek addressed by Antoninus to the Roman people and the sacred Senate after this memorable victory. It is sometimes printed after Justin's first Apology, but it is totally unconnected with the apologies. This letter is one of the most stupid forgeries of the many which exist, and it cannot be possibly founded even on the genuine report of Antoninus to the Senate. If it were genuine, it would free the emperor from the charge of persecuting men because they were Christians, for he says in this false letter that if a man accuse another only of being a Christian, and the accused confess, and there is nothing else against him, he must be set free; with this monstrous addition, made by a man inconceivably ignorant, that the informer must be burnt alive.^[A]

[A] Eusebius (v. 5) quotes Tertullian's Apology to the Roman Senate in confirmation of the story. Tertullian, he says, writes that letters of the emperor were extant, in which he declares that his army was saved by the prayers of the Christians; and that he "threatened to punish with death those who ventured to accuse us." It is possible that the forged letter which is now extant may be one of those which Tertullian had seen, for he uses the plural number, "letters." A great deal has been written about this miracle of the Thundering Legion, and more than is worth reading. There is a dissertation on this supposed miracle in Moyle's Works, London, 1726.

During the time of Antoninus Pius and Marcus Antoninus there appeared the first Apology of Justinus, and under M. Antoninus the Oration of Tatian against the Greeks, which was a fierce attack on the established religions; the address of Athenagoras to M. Antoninus on behalf of the Christians, and the Apology of Melito, bishop of Sardes, also addressed to the emperor, and that of Apolinarius. The first Apology of

Justinus is addressed to T. Antoninus Pius and his two adopted sons, M. Antoninus and L. Verus; but we do not know whether they read it.^[A] The second Apology of Justinus is entitled "to the Roman Senate;" but this superscription is from some copyist. In the first chapter Justinus addresses the Romans. In the second chapter he speaks of an affair that had recently happened in the time of M. Antoninus and L. Verus, as it seems; and he also directly addresses the emperor, saying of a certain woman, "she addressed a petition to thee, the emperor, and thou didst grant the petition." In other passages the writer addresses the two emperors, from which we must conclude that the Apology was directed to them. Eusebius (E.H. iv. 18) states that the second Apology was addressed to the successor of Antoninus Pius, and he names him Antoninus Verus, meaning M. Antoninus. In one passage of this second Apology (c. 8), Justinus, or the writer, whoever he may be, says that even men who followed the Stoic doctrines, when they ordered their lives according to ethical reason, were hated and murdered, such as Heraclitus, Musonius in his own times, and others; for all those who in any way labored to live according to reason and avoided wickedness were always hated; and this was the effect of the work of daemons.

^[A] Orosius, vii. 14, says that Justinus the philosopher presented to Antoninus Pius his work in defence of the Christian religion, and made him merciful to the Christians.

Justinus himself is said to have been put to death at Rome, because he refused to sacrifice to the gods. It cannot have been in the reign of Hadrian, as one authority states; nor in the time of Antoninus Pius, if the second Apology was written in the time of M. Antoninus; and there is evidence that this event took place under M. Antoninus and L. Verus, when Rusticus was praefect of the city.^[A]

[A] See the *Martyrium Sanctorum Justinii, &c.*, in the works of Justinus, ed. Otto, vol. ii. 559. "Junius Rusticus Praefectus Urbi erat sub imperatoribus M. Aurelio et L. Vero, id quod liquet ex Themistii Orat. xxxiv Dindorf. p. 451, et ex quodam illorum rescripto, Dig. 49. 1. 1, § 2" (Otto). The rescript contains the words "Junium Rusticum amicum nostrum Praefectum Urbi." The *Martyrium* of Justinus and others is written in Greek. It begins, "In the time of the wicked defenders of idolatry impious edicts were published against the pious Christians both in cities and country places, for the purpose of compelling them to make offerings to vain idols. Accordingly the holy men (Justinus, Chariton, a woman Charito, Paeon, Liberianus, and others) were brought before Rusticus, the praefect of Rome."

The *Martyrium* gives the examination of the accused by Rusticus. All of them professed to be Christians. Justinus was asked if he expected to ascend into heaven and to receive a reward for his sufferings, if he was condemned to death. He answered that he did not expect: he was certain of it. Finally, the test of obedience was proposed to the prisoners; they were required to sacrifice to the gods. All refused, and Rusticus pronounced the sentence, which was that those who refused to sacrifice to the gods and obey the emperor's order should be whipped and beheaded according to the law. The martyrs were then led to the usual place of execution and beheaded. Some of the faithful secretly carried off the bodies and deposited them in a fit place.

The persecution in which Polycarp suffered at Smyrna belongs to the time of M. Antoninus. The evidence for it is the letter of the church of Smyrna to the churches of Philomelium and the other Christian churches, and it is preserved by Eusebius (E.H. iv. 15). But the critics do not agree about the time of Polycarp's death, differing in the two extremes to the amount of twelve years. The circumstances of Polycarp's martyrdom were accompanied by miracles, one of which Eusebius (iv. 15) has omitted, but it appears in the oldest Latin version of the letter, which Usher published, and it is supposed that this version was made not long after the time of Eusebius. The notice at the end of the letter states that it was transcribed by Caius from the copy of Irenaeus, the disciple of Polycarp, then transcribed by Socrates at Corinth; "after which I Pionius again wrote it out from the copy above mentioned, having

searched it out by the revelation of Polycarp, who directed me to it," &c. The story of Polycarp's martyrdom is embellished with miraculous circumstances which some modern writers on ecclesiastical history take the liberty of omitting.^[A]

[A] Conyers Middleton, *An Inquiry into the Miraculous Powers, &c.* p. 126. Middleton says that Eusebius omitted to mention the dove, which flew out of Polycarp's body, and Dodwell and Archbishop Wake have done the same. Wake says, "I am so little a friend to such miracles that I thought it better with Eusebius to omit that circumstance than to mention it from Bp. Usher's Manuscript," which manuscript however, says Middleton, he afterwards declares to be so well attested that we need not any further assurance of the truth of it.

In order to form a proper notion of the condition of the Christians under M. Antoninus we must go back to Trajan's time. When the younger Pliny was governor of Bithynia, the Christians were numerous in those parts, and the worshipers of the old religion were falling off. The temples were deserted, the festivals neglected, and there were no purchasers of victims for sacrifice. Those who were interested in the maintenance of the old religion thus found that their profits were in danger. Christians of both sexes and all ages were brought before the governor who did not know what to do with them. He could come to no other conclusion than this, that those who confessed to be Christians and persevered in their religion ought to be punished; if for nothing else, for their invincible obstinacy. He found no crimes proved against the Christians, and he could only characterize their religion as a depraved and extravagant superstition, which might be stopped if the people were allowed the opportunity of recanting. Pliny wrote this in a letter to Trajan (*Plinius, Ep. x. 97*). He asked for the emperor's directions, because he did not know what to do. He remarks that he had never been engaged in judicial inquiries about the Christians, and that accordingly

he did not know what to inquire about, or how far to inquire and punish. This proves that it was not a new thing to examine into a man's profession of Christianity and to punish him for it.^[A]

^[A] Orosius (vii. 12) speaks of Trajan's persecution of the Christians, and of Pliny's application to him having led the emperor to mitigate his severity. The punishment by the Mosaic law for those who attempted to seduce the Jews to follow new gods was death. If a man was secretly enticed to such new worship, he must kill the seducer, even if the seducer were brother, son, daughter, wife, or friend. (Deut. xiii.)

Trajan's rescript is extant. He approved of the governor's judgment in the matter, but he said that no search must be made after the Christians; if a man was charged with the new religion and convicted, he must not be punished if he affirmed that he was not a Christian, and confirmed his denial by showing his reverence to the heathen gods. He added that no notice must be taken of anonymous informations, for such things were of bad example. Trajan was a mild and sensible man; and both motives of mercy and policy probably also induced him to take as little notice of the Christians as he could, to let them live in quiet if it were possible. Trajan's rescript is the first legislative act of the head of the Roman state with reference to Christianity, which is known to us. It does not appear that the Christians were further disturbed under his reign. The martyrdom of Ignatius by the order of Trajan himself is not universally admitted to be an historical fact.^[A]

^[A] The Martyrium Ignatii, first published in Latin by Archbishop Usher, is the chief evidence for the circumstances of Ignatius' death.

In the time of Hadrian it was no longer possible for the Roman government to overlook the great increase of the Christians and the hostility of the common sort to them. If the governors in the provinces were willing to let them alone, they could not resist the fanaticism of the heathen

community, who looked on the Christians as atheists. The Jews too, who were settled all over the Roman Empire, were as hostile to the Christians as the Gentiles were.^[A] With the time of Hadrian begin the Christian Apologies, which show plainly what the popular feeling towards the Christians then was. A rescript of Hadrian to Minucius Fundanus, the Proconsul of Asia, which stands at the end of Justin's first Apology,^[B] instructs the governor that innocent people must not be troubled, and false accusers must not be allowed to extort money from them; the charges against the Christians must be made in due form, and no attention must be paid to popular clamors; when Christians were regularly prosecuted and convicted of illegal acts, they must be punished according to their deserts; and false accusers also must be punished. Antoninus Pius is said to have published rescripts to the same effect. The terms of Hadrian's rescript seem very favorable to the Christians; but if we understand it in this sense, that they were only to be punished like other people for illegal acts, it would have had no meaning, for that could have been done without asking the emperor's advice. The real purpose of the rescript is that Christians must be punished if they persisted in their belief, and would not prove their renunciation of it by acknowledging the heathen religion. This was Trajan's rule, and we have no reason for supposing that Hadrian granted more to the Christians than Trajan did. There is also printed at the end of Justin's first Apology a rescript of Antoninus Pius to the Commune of (τὸ κοινὸν τῆς Ἀσίας) and it is also in Eusebius (E.H. iv. 13). The date of the rescript is the third consulship of Antoninus Pius.^[C] The rescript declares that the Christians—for they are meant, though the name Christians does not occur in the rescript—were not to be disturbed unless they were attempting something against the Roman rule; and no man was to be punished simply for being a Christian. But this rescript is spurious. Any man

moderately acquainted with Roman history will see by the style and tenor that it is a clumsy forgery.

[A] We have the evidence of Justinus (ad Diognetum, c. 5) to this effect: "The Christians are attacked by the Jews as if they were men of a different race, and are persecuted by the Greeks; and those who hate them cannot give the reason of their enmity."

[B] And in Eusebius (E.H. iv. 8, 9). Orosius (vii. 13) says that Hadrian sent this rescript to Minucius Fundanus, proconsul of Asia after being instructed in books written on the Christian religion by Quadratus, a disciple of the Apostles, and Aristides, an Athenian, an honest and wise man, and Serenus Granius. In the Greek text of Hadrian's rescript there is mentioned Serenius Granianus, the predecessor of Minucius Fundanus in the government of *Asia*.

This rescript of Hadrian has clearly been added to the Apology by some editor. The Apology ends with the words: ὁ φίλον τῷ Θεῷ τοῦτο γενέσθω.

[C] Eusebius (E.H. iv. 12), after giving the beginning of Justinus' first Apology, which contains the address to T. Antoninus and his two adopted sons, adds: "The same emperor being addressed by other brethren in Asia, honored the Commune of Asia with the following rescript." This rescript, which is in the next chapter of Eusebius (E.H. iv. 13) is in the sole name of Caesar Marcus Aurelius Antoninus Augustus Armenius, though Eusebius had just before said that he was going to give us a rescript of Antoninus Pius. There are some material variations between the two copies of the rescript besides the difference in the title, which difference makes it impossible to say whether the forger intended to assign this rescript to Pius or to M. Antoninus.

The author of the Alexandrine Chronicum says that Marcus, being moved by the entreaties of Melito and other heads of the church, wrote an Epistle to the Commune of Asia in which he forbade the Christians to be troubled on account of their religion. Valesius supposes this to be the letter or rescript which is contained in Eusebius (iv. 13), and to be the answer to the Apology of Melito, of which I shall soon give the substance. But Marcus certainly did not write this letter which is in Eusebius, and we know not what answer he made to Melito.

In the time of M. Antoninus the opposition between the old and the new belief was still stronger, and the adherents of the heathen religion urged those in authority to a more regular resistance to the invasions of the Christian faith.

Melito in his Apology to M. Antoninus represents the Christians of Asia as persecuted under new imperial orders. Shameless informers, he says, men who were greedy after the property of others, used these orders as a means of robbing those who were doing no harm. He doubts if a just emperor could have ordered anything so unjust; and if the last order was really not from the emperor, the Christians entreat him not to give them up to their enemies.^[A] We conclude from this that there were at least imperial rescripts or constitutions of M. Antoninus which were made the foundation of these persecutions. The fact of being a Christian was now a crime and punished, unless the accused denied their religion. Then come the persecutions at Smyrna, which some modern critics place in A.D. 167, ten years before the persecution of Lyon. The governors of the provinces under M. Antoninus might have found enough even in Trajan's rescript to warrant them in punishing Christians, and the fanaticism of the people would drive them to persecution, even if they were unwilling. But besides the fact of the Christians rejecting all the heathen ceremonies, we must not forget that they plainly maintain that all the heathen religions were false. The Christians thus declared war against the heathen rites, and it is hardly necessary to observe that this was a declaration of hostility against the Roman government, which tolerated all the various forms of superstition that existed in the empire, and could not consistently tolerate another religion, which declared that all the rest were false and all the splendid ceremonies of the empire only a worship of devils.

[A] Eusebius, iv. 26; and Routh's *Reliquiae Sacrae*, vol. I, and the notes. The interpretation of this Fragment is not easy. Mosheim misunderstood one passage so far as to affirm that Marcus promised rewards to those who denounced the Christians; an interpretation which is entirely false. Melito calls the Christian religion "our philosophy," which began among barbarians (the Jews), and flourished among the Roman subjects in the time of Augustus, to the great advantage of the empire, for from that time the power of the

Romans grew great and glorious. He says that the emperor has and will have as the successor to Augustus' power the good wishes of men, if he will protect that philosophy which grew up with the empire and began with Augustus, which philosophy the predecessors of Antoninus honored in addition to the other religions. He further says that the Christian religion had suffered no harm since the time of Augustus, but on the contrary had enjoyed all honor and respect that any man could desire. Nero and Domitian, he says, were alone persuaded by some malicious men to calumniate the Christian religion, and this was the origin of the false charges against the Christians. But this was corrected by the emperors who immediately preceded Antoninus, who often by their rescripts reprovved those who attempted to trouble the Christians. Hadrian, Antoninus' grandfather, wrote to many, and among them to Fundanus, the governor of Asia. Antoninus Pius, when Marcus was associated with him in the empire, wrote to the cities that they must not trouble the Christians; among others, to the people of Larissa, Thessalonica, the Athenians, and all the Greeks. Melito concluded thus: "We are persuaded that thou who hast about these things the same mind that they had, nay rather one much more humane and philosophical, wilt do all that we ask thee."—This Apology was written after A.D. 169, the year in which Verus died, for it speaks of Marcus only and his son Commodus. According to Melito's testimony, Christians had only been punished for their religion in the time of Nero and Domitian, and the persecutions began again in the time of M. Antoninus, and were founded on his orders, which were abused, as he seems to mean. He distinctly affirms "that the race of the godly is now persecuted and harassed by fresh imperial orders in Asia, a thing which had never happened before." But we know that all this is not true, and that Christians had been punished in Trajan's time.

If we had a true ecclesiastical history, we should know how the Roman emperors attempted to check the new religion; how they enforced their principle of finally punishing Christians, simply as Christians, which Justin in his Apology affirms that they did, and I have no doubt that he tells the truth; how far popular clamor and riots went in this matter, and how far many fanatical and ignorant Christians—for there were many such—contributed to excite the fanaticism on the other side and to embitter the quarrel between the Roman government and the new religion. Our extant ecclesiastical histories are manifestly falsified, and what truth they contain is grossly exaggerated; but the fact is

certain that in the time of M. Antoninus the heathen populations were in open hostility to the Christians, and that under Antoninus' rule men were put to death because they were Christians. Eusebius, in the preface to his fifth book, remarks that in the seventeenth year of Antoninus' reign, in some parts of the world, the persecution of the Christians became more violent, and that it proceeded from the populace in the cities; and he adds, in his usual style of exaggeration, that we may infer from what took place in a single nation that myriads of martyrs were made in the habitable earth. The nation which he alludes to is Gallia; and he then proceeds to give the letter of the churches of Vienna and Lugdunum. It is probable that he has assigned the true cause of the persecutions, the fanaticism of the populace, and that both governors and emperor had a great deal of trouble with these disturbances. How far Marcus was cognizant of these cruel proceedings we do not know, for the historical records of his reign are very defective. He did not make the rule against the Christians, for Trajan did that; and if we admit that he would have been willing to let the Christians alone, we cannot affirm that it was in his power, for it would be a great mistake to suppose that Antoninus had the unlimited authority which some modern sovereigns have had. His power was limited by certain constitutional forms, by the Senate, and by the precedents of his predecessors. We cannot admit that such a man was an active persecutor, for there is no evidence that he was,^[A] though it is certain that he had no good opinion of the Christians, as appears from his own words.^[B] But he knew nothing of them except their hostility to the Roman religion, and he probably thought that they were dangerous to the state, notwithstanding the professions, false or true, of some of the Apologists. So much I have said, because it would be unfair not to state all that can be urged against a man whom his contemporaries and subsequent ages

venerated as a model of virtue and benevolence. If I admitted the genuineness of some documents, he would be altogether clear from the charge of even allowing any persecutions; but as I seek the truth and am sure that they are false, I leave him to bear whatever blame is his due.^[C] I add that it is quite certain that Antoninus did not derive any of his ethical principles from a religion of which he knew nothing.^[D]

[A] Except that of Orosius (vii. 15), who says that during the Parthian war there were grievous persecutions of the Christians in Asia and Gallia under the orders of Marcus (praecepto ejus), and "many were crowned with the martyrdom of saints."

[B] See xi. 3. The emperor probably speaks of such fanatics as Clemens (quoted by Gataker on this passage) mentions. The rational Christians admitted no fellowship with them. "Some of these heretics," says Clemens, "show their impiety and cowardice by loving their lives, saying that the knowledge of the really existing God is true testimony (martyrdom), but that a man is a self-murderer who bears witness by his death. We also blame those who rush to death; for there are some, not of us, but only bearing the same name, who give themselves up. We say of them that they die without being martyrs, even if they are publicly punished; and they give themselves up to a death which avails nothing, as the Indian Gymnosophists give themselves up foolishly to fire." Cave, in his primitive Christianity (ii. c. 7), says of the Christians: "They did flock to the place of torment faster than droves of beasts that are driven to the shambles. They even longed to be in the arms of suffering. Ignatius, though then in his journey to Rome in order to his execution, yet by the way as he went could not but vent his passionate desire of it 'Oh that I might come to those wild beasts that are prepared for me; I heartily wish that I may presently meet with them; I would invite and encourage them speedily to devour me, and not be afraid to set upon me as they have been to others; nay, should they refuse it, I would even force them to it;" and more to the same purpose from Eusebius. Cave, an honest and good man, says all this in praise of the Christians; but I think that he mistook the matter. We admire a man who holds to his principles even to death; but these fanatical Christians are the Gymnosophists whom Clemens treats with disdain.

[C] Dr. F.C. Baur, in his work entitled "Das Christenthum und die Christliche Kirche der drei ersten Jahrhunderte," &c., has examined this question with great good sense and fairness, and I believe he has stated the truth as near as our authorities enable us to reach it.

[D] In the Digest, 48, 19, 30, there is the following excerpt from Modestinus: "Si quis aliquid fecerit, quo leves hominum animi superstitione numinis terrerentur, divus Marcus hujusmodi homines in insulam relegari rescipit."

There is no doubt that the Emperor's Reflections—or his Meditations, as they are generally named—is a genuine work. In the first book he speaks of himself, his family, and