

## VII.

[THIS particular record is noteworthy principally for containing a paper by my friend, the Professor, with a poem or two annexed or intercalated. I would suggest to young persons that they should pass over it for the present, and read, instead of it, that story about the young man who was in love with the young lady, and in great trouble for something like nine pages, but happily married on the tenth page or thereabouts, which, I take it for granted, will be contained in the periodical where this is found, unless it differ from all other publications of the kind. Perhaps, if such young people will lay the number aside, and take it up ten years, or a little more, from the present time, they may find something in it for their advantage. They can't possibly understand it all now.]

My friend, the Professor, began talking with me one day in a dreary sort of way. I could n't get at the difficulty for a good while, but at last it turned out that somebody had been calling him an old man. — He did n't mind his students calling him *the* old man, he said. That was a technical expression, and he thought that he remembered hearing it applied to himself when he was about twenty-five. It may be considered as a familiar and sometimes endearing appellation. An Irishwoman calls her husband "the old man," and he returns the caressing expression by speaking of her as "the old woman." But now, said he, just suppose a case like one of these. A young stranger is overheard talking of you as a very nice old gentleman. A friendly and genial critic speaks of your green old age as illustrating the truth of some

axiom you had uttered with reference to that period of life. What *I* call an old man is a person with a smooth, shining crown and a fringe of scattered white hairs, seen in the streets on sunshiny days, stooping as he walks, bearing a cane, moving cautiously and slowly; telling old stories, smiling at present follies, living in a narrow world of dry habits; one that remains waking when others have dropped asleep, and keeps a little night-lamp-flame of life burning year after year, if the lamp is not upset, and there is only a careful hand held round it to prevent the puffs of wind from blowing the flame out. That's what I call an old man.

Now, said the Professor, you don't mean to tell me that I have got to that yet? Why, bless you, I am several years short of the time when — [I knew what was coming, and could hardly keep from laughing; twenty years ago he used to quote it as one of those absurd speeches men of genius will make, and now he is going to argue from it] — several years short of the time when Balzac says that men are — most — you know — dangerous to — the hearts of — in short, most to be dreaded by duennas that have charge of susceptible females. — What age is that? said I, statistically. — Fifty-two years, answered the Professor. — Balzac ought to know, said I, if it is true that Goethe said of him that each of his stories must have been dug out of a woman's heart. But fifty-two is a high figure.

Stand in the light of the window, Professor, said I. — The Professor took up the desired position. — You have white hairs, I said. — Had 'em any time these twenty years, said the Professor. — And the crow's-foot, — *pes anserinus*, rather. — The Professor smiled, as I wanted him to, and the folds radiated like the ridges

of a half-opened fan, from the outer corner of the eyes to the temples. — And the calipers, said I. — What are the *calipers*? he asked, curiously. — Why, the parenthesis, said I. — *Parenthesis*? said the Professor; what's that? — Why look in the glass when you are disposed to laugh, and see if your mouth is n't framed in a couple of crescent lines, — so, my boy ( ). — It's all nonsense, said the Professor; just look at my *biceps*; — and he began pulling off his coat to show me his arm. Be careful, said I; you can't bear exposure to the air, at your time of life, as you could once. — I will box with you, said the Professor, row with you, walk with you, ride with you, swim with you, or sit at table with you, for fifty dollars a side. — Pluck survives stamina, I answered.

The Professor went off a little out of humor. A few weeks afterwards he came in, looking very good-natured, and brought me a paper, which I have here, and from which I shall read you some portions, if you don't object. He had been thinking the matter over, he said, — had read Cicero "De Senectute," and made up his mind to meet old age half way. These were some of his reflections which he had written down; so here you have

#### THE PROFESSOR'S PAPER.

There is no doubt when old age begins. The human body is a furnace which keeps in blast three-score years and ten, more or less. It burns about three hundred pounds of carbon a year (besides other fuel), when in fair working order, according to a great chemist's estimate. When the fire slackens, life declines; when it goes out, we are dead.

It has been shown by some noted French experi-

menters, that the amount of combustion increases up to about the thirtieth year, remains stationary to about forty-five, and then diminishes. This last is the point where old age starts from. The great fact of physical life is the perpetual commerce with the elements, and the fire is the measure of it.

About this time of life, if food is plenty where you live, — for that, you know, regulates matrimony, — you may be expecting to find yourself a grandfather some fine morning; a kind of domestic felicity which gives one a cool shiver of delight to think of, as among the not remotely possible events.

I don't mind much those slipshod lines Dr. Johnson wrote to Mrs. Thrale, telling her about life's declining from *thirty-five*; the furnace is in full blast for ten years longer, as I have said. The Romans came very near the mark; their age of enlistment reached from seventeen to forty-six years.

What is the use of fighting against the seasons, or the tides, or the movements of the planetary bodies, or this ebb in the wave of life that flows through us? We are old fellows from the moment the fire begins to go out. Let us always behave like gentlemen when we are introduced to new acquaintances.

#### *Incipit Allegoria Senectutis.*

Old Age, this is Mr. Professor; Mr. Professor, this is Old Age.

*Old Age.* — Mr. Professor, I hope to see you well. I have known you for some time, though I think you did not know me. Shall we walk down the street together?

*Professor* (drawing back a little). — We can talk more quietly, perhaps, in my study. Will you tell

me how it is you seem to be acquainted with everybody you are introduced to, though he evidently considers you an entire stranger?

*Old Age.* — I make it a rule never to force myself upon a person's recognition until I have known him at least *five years*.

*Professor.* — Do you mean to say that you have known me so long as that?

*Old Age.* — I do. I left my card on you longer ago than that, but I am afraid you never read it; yet I see you have it with you.

*Professor.* — Where?

*Old Age.* — There, between your eyebrows, — three straight lines running up and down; all the probate courts know that token, — “Old Age, his mark.” Put your forefinger on the inner end of one eyebrow, and your middle finger on the inner end of the other eyebrow; now separate the fingers, and you will smooth out my sign-manual; that's the way you used to look before I left my card on you.

*Professor.* — What message do people generally send back when you first call on them?

*Old Age.* — *Not at home.* Then I leave a card and go. Next year I call; get the same answer; leave another card. So for five or six, — sometimes ten years or more. At last, if they don't let me in, I break in through the front door or the windows.

We talked together in this way some time. Then Old Age said again, — Come, let us walk down the street together, — and offered me a cane, an eyeglass, a tippet, and a pair of over-shoes. — No, much obliged to you, said I. I don't want those things, and I had a little rather talk with you here, privately, in my study. So I dressed myself up in a jaunty way

and walked out alone; — got a fall, caught a cold, was laid up with a lumbago, and had time to think over this whole matter.

*Explicit Allegoria Senectutis.*

We have settled when old age begins. Like all Nature's processes, it is gentle and gradual in its approaches, strewed with illusions, and all its little griefs are soothed by natural sedatives. But the iron hand is not less irresistible because it wears the velvet glove. The button-wood throws off its bark in large flakes, which one may find lying at its foot, pushed out, and at last pushed off, by that tranquil movement from beneath, which is too slow to be seen, but too powerful to be arrested. One finds them always, but one rarely sees them fall. So it is our youth drops from us, — scales off, sapless and lifeless, and lays bare the tender and immature fresh growth of old age. Looked at collectively, the changes of old age appears as a series of personal insults and indignities, terminating at last in death, which Sir Thomas Browne has called “the very disgrace and ignominy of our natures.”

My lady's cheek can boast no more  
The cranberry white and pink it wore;  
And where her shining locks divide,  
The parting line is all too wide —

No, no, — this will never do. Talk about men, if you will, but spare the poor women.

We have a brief description of seven stages of life by a remarkably good observer. It is very presumptuous to attempt to add to it, yet I have been struck with the fact that life admits of a natural analysis into no less than fifteen distinct periods. Taking the five primary divisions, infancy, childhood, youth, man-

hood, old age, each of these has its own three periods of immaturity, complete development, and decline. I recognize an *old* baby at once, — with its “pipe and mug” (a stick of candy and a porringer), — so does everybody; and an old child shedding its milk-teeth is only a little prototype of the old man shedding his permanent ones. Fifty or thereabouts is only the childhood, as it were, of old age; the graybeard youngster must be weaned from his late suppers now. So you will see that you have to make fifteen stages at any rate, and that it would not be hard to make twenty-five; five primary, each with five secondary divisions.

The infancy and childhood of commencing old age have the same ingenuous simplicity and delightful unconsciousness about them that are shown by the first stage of the earlier periods of life. The great delusion of mankind is in supposing that to be individual and exceptional which is universal and according to law. A person is always startled when he hears himself seriously called an old man for the first time.

Nature gets us out of youth into manhood, as sailors are hurried on board of vessels, — in a state of intoxication. We are hustled into maturity reeling with our passions and imaginations, and we have drifted far away from port before we awake out of our illusions. But to carry us out of maturity into old age, without our knowing where we are going, she drugs us with strong opiates, and so we stagger along with wide open eyes that see nothing until snow enough has fallen on our heads to rouse our half comatose brains out of their stupid trances.

There is one mark of age which strikes me more than any of the physical ones; — I mean the formation of

*Habits.* An old man who shrinks into himself falls into ways which become as positive and as much beyond the reach of outside influences as if they were governed by clock work. The *animal* functions, as the physiologists call them, in distinction from the *organic*, tend, in the process of deterioration to which age and neglect united gradually lead them, to assume the periodical or rhythmical type of movement. Every man's *heart* (this organ belongs, you know, to the organic system) has a regular mode of action; but I know a great many men whose *brains*, and all their voluntary existence flowing from their brains, have a *systole* and *diastole* as regular as that of the heart itself. Habit is the approximation of the animal system to the organic. It is a confession of failure in the highest function of being, which involves a perpetual self-determination, in full view of all existing circumstances. But habit, you see, is an action in present circumstances from past motives. It is substituting a *vis a tergo* for the evolution of living force.

When a man, instead of burning up three hundred pounds of carbon a year, has got down to two hundred and fifty, it is plain enough he must economize force somewhere. Now habit is a labor-saving invention which enables a man to get along with less fuel, — that is all; for fuel is force, you know, just as much in the page I am writing for you as in the locomotive or the legs which carry it to you. Carbon is the same thing, whether you call it wood, or coal, or bread and cheese. A reverend gentleman demurred to this statement, — as if, because combustion is asserted to be the *sine qua non* of thought, therefore thought is alleged to be a purely chemical process. Facts of chemistry

are one thing, I told him, and facts of consciousness another. It can be proved to him, by a very simple analysis of some of his spare elements, that every Sunday, when he does his duty faithfully, he uses up more phosphorus out of his brain and nerves than on ordinary days. But then he had his choice whether to do his duty, or to neglect it, and save his phosphorus and other combustibles.

It follows from all this that *the formation of habits* ought naturally to be, as it is, the special characteristic of age. As for the muscular powers, they pass their maximum long before the time when the true decline of life begins, if we may judge by the experience of the ring. A man is "stale," I think, in their language, soon after thirty, — often, no doubt, much earlier, as gentlemen of the pugilistic profession are exceedingly apt to keep their vital fire burning *with the blower up*.

— So far without Tully. But in the mean time I have been reading the treatise, "De Senectute." It is not long, but is a leisurely performance. The old gentleman was sixty-three years of age when he addressed it to his friend, T. Pomponius Atticus, Eq., a person of distinction, some two or three years older. We read it when we are school-boys, forget all about it for thirty years, and then take it up again by a natural instinct, — provided always that we read Latin as we drink water, without stopping to taste it, as all of us who ever learned it at school or college ought to do.

Cato is the chief speaker in the dialogue. A good deal of it is what would be called in vulgar phrase "slow." It unpacks and unfolds incidental illustrations which a modern writer would look at the back of, and toss each to its pigeon-hole. I think ancient

classics and ancient people are alike in the tendency to this kind of expansion.

An old doctor came to me once (this is literal fact) with some contrivance or other for people with broken kneepans. As the patient would be confined for a good while, he might find it dull work to sit with his hands in his lap. Reading, the ingenious inventor suggested, would be an agreeable mode of passing the time. He mentioned, in his written account of his contrivance, various works which might amuse the weary hour. I remember only three, — Don Quixote, Tom Jones, and *Watts on the Mind*.

It is not generally understood that Cicero's essay was delivered as a lyceum lecture (*concio popularis*) at the Temple of Mercury. The journals (*papyri*) of the day ("Tempora Quotidiana," — "Tribunus Quirinalis," — "Præco Romanus," and the rest) gave abstracts of it, one of which I have translated and modernized, as being a substitute for the analysis I intended to make.

#### IV. Kal Mart. . . .

The lecture at the Temple of Mercury, last evening, was well attended by the *élite* of our great city. Two hundred thousand sestertia were thought to have been represented in the house. The doors were besieged by a mob of shabby fellows (*illotum vulgus*), who were at length quieted after two or three had been somewhat roughly handled (*gladio jugulati*). The speaker was the well-known Mark Tully, Eq., — the subject Old Age. Mr. T. has a lean and scraggy person, with a very unpleasant excrescence upon his nasal feature, from which his nickname of *chick-pea* (Cicero) is said by some to be derived. As a lecturer is public prop-

erty, we may remark, that his outer garment (*toga*) was of cheap stuff and somewhat worn, and that his general style and appearance of dress and manner (*habitus, vestitusque*) were somewhat provincial.

The lecture consisted of an imaginary dialogue between Cato and Lælius. We found the first portion rather heavy, and retired a few moments for refreshment (*pocula quædam vini*). — All want to reach old age, says Cato, and grumble when they get it; therefore they are donkeys. — The lecturer will allow us to say that he is the donkey; we know we shall grumble at old age, but we want to live through youth and manhood, *in spite* of the troubles we shall groan over. — There was considerable prosing as to what old age can do and can't. — True, but not new. Certainly, old folks can't jump, — break the necks of their thigh-bones (*femorum cervices*), if they do; can't crack nuts with their teeth; can't climb a greased pole (*malum inunctum scandere non possunt*); but they can tell old stories and give you good advice; if they know what you have made up your mind to do when you ask them. — All this is well enough, but won't set the Tiber on fire (*Tiberim accendere nequaquam potest.*)

There were some clever things enough (*dicta haud inepta*), a few of which are worth reporting. — Old people are accused of being forgetful; but they never forget where they have put their money. — Nobody is so old he does n't think he can live a year. — The lecturer quoted an ancient maxim, — Grow old early, if you would be old long, — but disputed it. — Authority, he thought, was the chief privilege of age. — It is not great to have money, but fine to govern those who have it. — Old age begins at *forty-six* years, according to the common opinion. — It is not every kind of

old age or of wine that grows sour with time. — Some excellent remarks were made on immortality, but mainly borrowed from and credited to Plato. — Several pleasing anecdotes were told. — Old Milo, champion of the heavy weights in his day, looked at his arms and whimpered, "They are dead." Not so dead as you, you old fool, — says Cato; — you never were good for anything but for your shoulders and flanks. — Pisistratus asked Solon what made him dare to be so obstinate. Old age, said Solon.

The lecture was on the whole acceptable, and a credit to our culture and civilization. — The reporter goes on to state that there will be no lecture next week, on account of the expected combat between the bear and the barbarian. Betting (*sponsio*) two to one (*duo ad unum*) on the bear.

— After all, the most encouraging things I find in the treatise, "De Senectute," are the stories of men who have found new occupations when growing old, or kept up their common pursuits in the extreme period of life. Cato learned Greek when he was old, and speaks of wishing to learn the fiddle, or some such instrument (*fidibus*), after the example of Socrates. Solon learned something new, every day, in his old age, as he gloried to proclaim. Cyrus pointed out with pride and pleasure the trees he had planted with his own hand. [I remember a pillar on the Duke of Northumberland's estate at Alnwick, with an inscription in similar words, if not the same. That, like other country pleasures, never wears out. None is too rich, none too poor, none too young, none too old to enjoy it.] There is a New England story I have heard, more to the point, however, than any of Cicero's. A

young farmer was urged to set out some apple-trees. — No, said he, they are too long growing, and I don't want to plant for other people. The young farmer's father was spoken to about it, but he, with better reason, alleged that apple-trees were slow and life was fleeting. At last some one mentioned it to the old grandfather of the young farmer. He had nothing else to do, — so he stuck in some trees. He lived long enough to drink barrels of cider made from the apples that grew on those trees.

As for myself, after visiting a friend lately, — [Do remember all the time that this is the Professor's paper.] — I satisfied myself that I had better concede the fact that, — my contemporaries are not so young as they have been, — and that, — awkward as it is, — science and history agree in telling me that I can claim the immunities and must own the humiliations of the early stage of senility. Ah! but we have all gone down the hill together. The dandies of my time have split their waistbands and taken to high low shoes. The beauties of my recollections — where are they? They have run the gauntlet of the years as well as I. First the years pelted them with red roses till their cheeks were all on fire. By and by they began throwing white roses, and that morning flush passed away. At last one of the years threw a snow-ball, and after that no year let the poor girls pass without throwing snow-balls. And then came rougher missiles, — ice and stones; and from time to time an arrow whistled, and down went one of the poor girls. So there are but few left; and we don't call those few *girls*, but —

Ah, me! here am I groaning just as the old Greek sighed *Ai, ai!* and the old Roman, *Eheu!* I have no

doubt we should die of shame and grief at the indignities offered us by age, if it were not that we see so many others as badly as or worse off than ourselves. We always compare ourselves with our contemporaries.

[I was interrupted in my reading just here. Before I began at the next breakfast, I read them these verses; — I hope you will like them, and get a useful lesson from them.]

## THE LAST BLOSSOM.

Though young no more, we still would dream  
Of beauty's dear deluding wiles;  
The leagues of life to graybeards seem  
Shorter than boyhood's lingering miles.

Who knows a woman's wild caprice?  
It played with Goethe's silvered hair,  
And many a Holy Father's "niece"  
Has softly smoothed the papal chair.

When sixty bids us sigh in vain  
To melt the heart of sweet sixteen,  
We think upon those ladies twain  
Who loved so well the tough old Dean.

We see the Patriarch's wintry face,  
The maid of Egypt's dusky glow,  
And dream that Youth and Age embrace,  
As April violets fill with snow.

Tranced in her Lord's Olympian smile  
His lotus-loving Memphian lies, —  
The musky daughter of the Nile  
With plaited hair and almond eyes.

Might we but share one wild caress  
Ere life's autumnal blossoms fall,