own particular, I do certainly believe, that since that Age, both my Understanding and my Constitution have rather decayed than improved, and retired rather than advanced. 'Tis possible, that with those who make the best use of their Time, Knowledge and Experience may grow up and increase with their Years; but the Vivacity, Quickness and Steadiness, and other pieces of us, of much greater Importance, and much more essentially our own, languish and decay." *

* *Essays of Montaigne,* book i. chap. lvii.: "Of Age."

CHAPTER IV.

GREAT OLD MEN.

Call him not old whose visionary brain
Holds o'er the past its undivided reign:
For him in vain the envious seasons roll
Who bears eternal summer in his soul—
Dr. OLIVER WENDEL HOLMES.

O hours more blest than gold,
By whose blest use we lengthen life, free
From drear decays of age, outlive the old.—
ANNA SEWARD.

Don't let your heart grow cold, and you may carry cheerfulness and love with you into the teens of your second century, if you can last so long.—
Dr. O. W. HOLMES.

Contentment in old age is deserved by him alone who has not lost his faith in what is good, his persevering strength of will, and his desire for active employment.—
TURGANIEF.

Everything comes, if a man will only wait.—BEACONFIELD.

JOHNSON said of Goldsmith, after his death, that "he was a plant that flowered late; there was nothing remarkable about him when he was young." Men are like plants; many of them flower late. The plants that flower the soonest are often the most evanescent. Early in the year the anemones, crocuses, and snowdrops appear. Then come the daffodils "that come before the swallow dares, and take the winds of March with beauty." The sweet violets accompany them—the "violet by a mossy stone, half hidden from the eye." The lady's-smock, hare-bell, dan lily of the valley follow. They appear in leaping,

bounding spring—full of fountains, buds, birds, sweet-briars, and sunbeams. The Primrose Day is on the 19th of April. Then comes lusty, full-blown summer, when plants and flowers abound. The rose begins in June, is glorious in July, and flourishes to the end of autumn. The chrysanthemums, dahlias, and sunflowers glorify the close of the year. The frost of winter comes, and there is an end of flowers; though there is still the Christmas rose.

Although great men are often heralded by the promises of their youth, it is not always so; for, like Goldsmith, many flower late in life. The powers of men's brains vary according to their temperaments. Some are quick, others are slow; some are sanguine, others are lymphatic. Some boys of naturally good powers make no progress at school, while others of quicker growth completely outstrip them. Yet the former may be all the stronger and more durable in their completed manhood; as the slow-growing oak is stronger and more durable than the quick-growing larch.

It has even been held by some that prematurely clever boys and girls prove failures in actual life, and often achieve nothing more than ill-health and mediocrity. Hazlitt thought it a disadvantage for a boy to distinguish himself at school. He held that "any one who has passed through the regular gradations of a classical education and is not made a fool by it, may consider himself as having had a very narrow escape." * The grave and austere Crebillon, though possessed of good abilities, was pronounced "an idle rascal" at school; and after he had been at college, the following memorandum stood against his name in the register: "Puer ingeniosus, sed insignio nebulo."

Lord Cockburn, the well-known Scotch judge, author of *The Life of Lord Jeffrey*, said of himself that he never

* *Table Talk:* "On the Ignorance of the Learned."

got a single prize, and once sat *boobie* at the annual public examination of the High School at Edinburgh. His lordship has accordingly a kind word to say for Dunces. "The same powers," he said, "that raise a boy high in a good school, make it probable that he will rise high in life. But in bad schools, it is very nearly the reverse. And even in the most rationally conducted, superiority affords only a gleam of hope for the future. Men change, and still more boys. The High School distinctions very speedily vanished in actual life; and fully as much by the sinking of the luminaries who had shone in the zenith, as by the rising of those who had been lying on the horizon. I have ever since had a distrust of duxes, and thought boobies rather hopeful." *

Lord Cockburn shows that the boy's interest in his lessons, and his progress at school, depend partly upon the character of the master, but principally upon the character of the boy himself. He says that he was "driven stupid" by a bad schoolmaster, and so was his friend James Nasmyth, the engineer, as related in his Autobiography. These bad schoolmasters seem to have been unacquainted with the nature of youth, ignorant of the character of boys, and without any conception of the art of encouraging them to learn—trusting mainly to the lash. Lord Cockburn says that during the four years that he remained under his merciless giant, "there were probably not ten days in which he was not flogged at least once."

Many boys of robust constitution are naturally fonder of playing than of learning. To sit down and learn lessons from books is in a measure contrary to their nature. Hence the sickly boy, possessed of a retentive memory, and without any love for outdoor sports, will usually stand high in his class. Though he may carry away the prizes, the

* Lord Cockburn, *Memorials of his Time.* pp. 11 12.

other will carry away what is still more important—a stock of physical health; and it often happens that the positions of the two boys at school are completely reversed in actual life. Sir William Hamilton declared that senior wranglers applied so assiduously to mathematics that they became little better than idiots in the ordinary affairs of life; but, as we have elsewhere seen, this is not always, indeed very rarely, the case.

One cannot tell to what height a dull boy may grow. He must have time to develop. Experience only brings to light his real tastes and sympathies. It may be that he has been put into a wrong groove by his parents. Guido was sent to a music-master to be made a musician; Benvenuto Cellini played second horn with his father in a band; Guerchino was apprenticed to a stone-mason; Claude Lorraine to a pastry-cook, and Molière to an upholsterer. But being strong in character, and decided in their bent, they broke away from the pursuits to which their parents had destined them, and each carved out their own career. They were of course helped by others. Thus Giotto, the shepherd boy, was found by Cimabue drawing a sheep with a sharp stone on a piece of slate. He took him away from his humble calling, and introduced him to art. Canova, too, first revealed his genius by modelling a lion out of a roll of butter, for the Senator Falieri of Venice; and he was, on the recommendation of the latter, received into the studio of Bernardi Toretti, whom he soon completely surpassed.

Although the traits and dispositions of the boy often afford indications of his future character, it is impossible to predict what the future man will be. The child is not always the father of the man. Signs of promise are not to be relied on; nor are predictions of failure always fulfilled. The precocious boy may prove a mediocre man, and the precocious girl may prove a commonplace woman. Yet

the dunce, from whom nothing is expected, may turn out to be a brilliant explorer, warrior, investigator, or man of science. Look into the kaleidoscope of biography, and you find the most singular transformations. One would scarcely expect to find in the poor miner's boy, singing carols through the streets at Erfurt, Martin Luther, the German reformer; or in the ill-used sickly boy, serving beer in a German cabaret, the philosopher and astronomer Kepler, one of the greatest men of his time; or in that young soldier, who spent his youth in battles and seiges, the great Descartes, one of the most original of thinkers, who actually conceived, during his garrison life, the project of reforming the whole system of human philosophy. In that dark-browed gipsy—tinker, soldier, and gaol-bird—behold John Bunyan, author of the *Pilgrim's Progress.* In that gentle, modest, reserved page-boy, you see the brilliant painter, Peter Paul Rubens. But who is this, leader of rapscallions, robber of orchards, and climber of church steeples? No other than the heroic and sagacious Clive, founder of the British power in India! And next, whom have we in the sweet and patient orphan child, whose little hands the good Abbé Prozart presses between his own, kissing the mild forehead of the boy? No other than Maximilian Robespierre!

The clever and diligent boy often fulfils the promise of his youth; though, if wanting in application, he may turn out to be a very indifferent man; whereas the boy of no promise at all, may achieve distinction and eminence, especially if he possess patient application and perseverance. Strong, healthy boys are naturally more attracted to outdoor sports than to indoor learning, finding it a very irksome task to pore over dry books and commit hard lessons to memory, while their nature longs for the open air and outdoor life. Yet, as we have seen, the boy often becomes the very reverse of what he promised to be. Who would

have expected to find St. Augustine, the "Doctor of Grace" as he was called, a youthful voluptuary in early life; or that Theodore de Bèza, the elegant translator of the New Testament into Latin, should have been principally known in his youth for the wantonness and indecency of his verses? Two of the most reckless young gamblers in France eventually became the greatest cardinals and statesmen of their time—Cardinals Richelieu and Mazarin? *

When the three Boileaus were boys, their father, Giles, the Registrar, thus described then: "There is Gilot, who is a braggart, and Jaco a rake, while as for Colin, he is a simple soul, who has not a bad word to say of anybody." Yet Gilot, the braggart, obtained a seat in the French Academy; Jaco, the rake, became a canon in the Sainte Chapelle; and Colin became a poet and satirist, the friend of Racine, Molière, and La Fontaine.

Nor are the performances of young men at college to be relied on as evidence of what they are capable of accomplishing when their powers have become developed and matured. To lie fallow, suits minds as well as soils; indeed, heavy cropping proves impoverishing in the long run. Edward Hyde, Lord Clarendon, was by no means industrious in his youth. He learnt very little at college, where his time was chiefly spent in gay and dissipated company. Nor was it until he had married and become chastened by sorrow, occasioned by the death of his wife, that he applied

* "Some who afterwards beheld Mazarin's composure during many a trying crisis of his career, remembered with what equanimity he had borne in youth a long run of ill-fortune at the gambling-table. He was wont to say, 'che ad nomo splendido il cielo è tresorio'; and he certainly sometimes drew largely on his balance. On one occasion, he lost everything he possessed except a pair of silk stockings; he pawned them to raise a few pieces in order to try his luck again. His confidence was rewarded, and he soon won back the rest of his wardrobe." *Edinburgh Review*, January 1866.

himself diligently to the study of law and literature, in which, as well as in legislation, he achieved a high reputation.

Bishop Warburton was thought to be a very stupid boy; one of his masters describing him as "the dullest of all dull scholars." Warburton, however, had faith in himself. "I know very well," he said to a friend who taxed him with being dull and uninventive, "I know very well what you and others think of me; but I believe that I shall, some day or other, convince the world that I am not so ignorant or so great a fool as I am believed to be." When he wrote and published his *Divine Legation*, his former teacher could scarcely believe that so great a work could proceed from so thick a skull.

Even the Rev. Mr. Malthus, a man of original powers, when at Cambridge, was principally distinguished for his love of fighting for fighting's sake. Dr. Paley was a still more remarkable instance of the performances of manhood contradicting the unfavorable promises of youth. Though his parents were in moderate circumstances, and he had to make his own way in the world, Paley was one of the idlest and most dissipated of youths during his first two years at Cambridge. He lay in bed until noon, and spent much of his time at fairs, visiting the strolling players and puppet shows. He was suddenly roused from his torpor and frivolity by one of his companions, a rich and dissipated fellow, who stood by his bedside one morning at four o'clock, and startled him by saying: "What a fool you are! I have the means of dissipation, and can afford to be idle. You are poor, and cannot afford it. I should do nothing even if I were to apply myself. You are capable of doing everything, and rising to eminence. I have been kept awake all night by this thought, and have come solemnly to warn you." This admonition, so singular and unexpected, turned the whole tide of Paley's life. He formed

resolutions which he had never done before. Instead of idling in bed half the day, he determined to rise at five. He kept his resolutions, studied hard and at the end of the year came out senior wrangler.

Nicholas Breakspeare was plucked at college, having been rejected in his "little-go"; but he possessed diligence and perseverance, and applying himself to study with renewed application, he rose to one dignity after another, and ended as Pope, under the title of Adrian IV.—the only Englishman who ever attained that great dignity. At a much later date, Nassau Senior, when he first went in for examination at Oxford, was "plucked"; but, determined to succeed, he vigorously applied himself to his studies, and six months after his defeat, he came out with the highest honors which the examining masters could confer.

Dryden made no figure either at school or college. Indeed, he distinguished himself mostly by his irregularities. When about thirty, he went up to London in Norwich drugget; and his necessities, rather than his natural impulse, led him to embark on the sea of letters. For seventeen years he maintained himself by writing for the stage, after which—from his fiftieth to his sixty-ninth year—he produced the great works for which he is now celebrated. It was only late in life that he displayed the energy and rapture of imagination which are usually thought to be the characteristics of youth.

Swift, like Goldsmith, was a "plant that flowered late." Swift was quite undistinguished as a student while at Trinity College, Dublin; and he only obtained his degree of B. A. *speciali gratia.* Excepting a few immature poetical essays, he gave no evidence of intellectual power. His first pamphlet on "Dissensions in Athens and Rome," was published when he was thirty-four, and excited no attention. Three years later, his *Tale of a Tub* appeared, and he at once became famous.

Goldsmith was an especially dull boy. He was declared to be stupid, indolent, and a blockhead. The French would have called him *un etourdi.* His ungainly appearance made him the butt of his school, and he was nicknamed "Esop." He was sent to Trinity College at seventeen, but he made little progress. He graduated at twenty-one, coming out "wooden spoon"—standing lowest in the list of B. A. for the year. He went to Edinburgh, and studied medicine. Then he went to Leyden, a famous medical school; after which he wandered over Europe, supporting himself by playing the flute. At twenty-eight he settled in London, where he was first employed by an apothecary; then he went as an usher to teach in a school; at thirty, he offered himself at the College of Surgeons at a time when the examination was very easy, but he was rejected. Then he became an author by compulsion. "The door of Surgeons' Hall was shut upon him," says Foster, "but the gate of the beautiful mountain was slowly opening." At thirty-six, he brought out *The Traveller,* which had been begun many years before; he also wrote *The Vicar of Wakefield,* which Johnson sold to Newberry in order to save Goldsmith from arrest—and from this time he was famous. *The Deserted Village* was not published until his forty-second year. Goldsmith was rather laughed at during his lifetime. Walpole called him an "inspired idiot." Johnson, who was always his friend, said of him, "No man was more foolish when he had not a pen in his hand, or more wise when he had one."

Charles James Fox said to Sir Joshua Reynolds that *The Traveller* "was one of the finest poems in the English language."* Yet it was not a poem of passion, but of observation, experience. and reflection. It was very much like Goldsmith himself, as expressed in the first line of the

* Boswell's *Life of Johnson,* chap. lxiii. (edited by Croker.)

poem, "Remote, unfriended, melancholy, slow." The poets of passion have for the most part written early and died young—like Keats, Shelley, and Byron; while poets of intellect, like Milton, Goethe, Wordsworth, wrote late in life, and lived to a mature age. Byron, however, was by no means a precocious boy. When, by some chance-correct reply, he was sent to the top of his class, the master would say, "Now, Geordie, man, let me see how soon you will be at the foot again."

Some young poets have owed their inspiration to falling in love. John Evald, the distinguished Danish poet, was a great reader when a boy. His favorite books were *Robinson Crusoe* and *Tom Jones.* The former made him in love with the sea and sea life, and he left home at thirteen to make his way to Holland, from whence he expected to set sail for Batavia. But he was overtaken, and his plans were frustrated. He returned to Copenhagen, and proceeded to fill his mind with northern fable and mythology. He suddenly became violently enamored of a young lady, and described his passion in the most glowing colors: but she gave her hand to another, and left him alone lamenting. He determined to become a soldier, and joined the Prussian service. After various military adventures he returned to Denmark, his mind being still affected by melancholy, through the failure of his first love. Sympathy is often taught by affliction, and difficulties and disappointments are sometimes necessary to evoke a man's best powers. Evald consoled himself with poetry. He wrote many noble works, but his masterpiece, *Balder's Död* (the Death of Balder), is considered superior to anything which has appeared in the Danish language.

Steele and Coleridge were both soldiers in early life. After leaving Merton College, Oxford, Steele enlisted as a private soldier in the Guards; but the colonel of the regiment, after ascertaining his merits, presented him with an

ensign's commission. He afterwards got the command of a company. Steele particularly distinguished himself at the attack on the Castle of Namur, as well as during the seige of Venloo. He left the army at thirty, and began writing comedies for the stage. He afterwards started *The Tatler,* and was the principal contributor to that periodical, as well as to *The Spectator.*

Coleridge says that he spent from his tenth to his eighteenth year at a rough school in London. This was Christ's Hospital; though it must have been a pleasure to him to have had Charles Lamb among his companions. "His nature," he himself says, "was repressed, wronged, and drawn inward. At fourteen, I was in a continual state of low fever." He made great progress, however, in classical knowledge, and before his fifteenth year he translated the hymns of Synesius into English anacreontics. In his nineteenth year he entered Jesus College, Cambridge. He obtained a prize for a Greek ode, and distinguished himself in the contest for the Craven Scholarship. But he did not stay long at Cambridge. During his second year he suddenly left the university in a fit of despondency. He had fallen deeply in love, and his ardent affection was unrequited. After wandering about London in extreme pecuniary distress, he enlisted in the 15th Dragoons under the assumed name of Comberbatch. One of the officers, accidentally discovering his classical acquirements, succeeded in effecting his discharge from the army. "I sometimes," said Coleridge to a friend, "compare my own life to that of Steele (yet oh! how unlike), from having myself also, for a brief time, written 'private' after my name, or rather another name; for, being at a loss when suddenly asked my name, I answered 'Cumberback,' and verily my habits were so little equestrian, that my horse, I doubt not, was of that opinion."

Coleridge returned to Bristol, and entered into arrange-

ments with Cottle the publisher. His first volume of poems was published when he was twenty-four years old; his next, the *Lyrical Ballads*, in conjunction with Wordsworth, when he was twenty-six and Wordsworth was twenty-eight. The *Ancient Mariner* and the first part of *Christabel*—perhaps the finest of his imaginative works—were written the year before they were published,—that is, when Coleridge was twenty-five. His tragedy, *Remorse*, was also written at the same time. He ceased, for the most part, to compose poetry, and wrote for the press—principally for the *Morning Post* and *Courier*—after which he became a critic on metaphysics, poetry, the drama, and the fine arts, besides being a great converser and monologist. Wordsworth, the poet of feeling, observation, and intellect, wrote his *Excursion*, which exhibited perhaps the culmination of his genius, when he was forty-four; but he went on writing almost until his death, which occurred in his eightieth year.

It does not necessarily happen, as is sometimes alleged, that precocious brains become prematurely exhausted, and that clever boys fail in actual life. Some of the most precocious youths have been among the greatest of old men. Wordsworth began to write verses while at school, and went on writing until eighty. Metastasio was very precocious. He wrote verses at ten, and produced his tragedy of *Guistino* at fourteen. He lived till eighty-four, and wrote poetry and dramas to the end of his life. Pallisot, so sickly in his childhood, was received master of arts at twelve, and bachelor of theology at sixteen. He married at nineteen, and became the father of a family, as well as the author of two tragedies; and at eighty, in spite of a very active and exciting life, he was still sound in health and full of vigor.

It is true, there are precocities that break down, such as Lord Chesterfield's son, who could write a theme in three

languages when a boy, but who was a mere cypher when he became a man; William Crotch and Charles Wesley, the precocious musicians, who never got beyond mediocrity; Schubart, Schiller's friend, who promised so well, but turned out so ill;* Monk Lewis, who wrote his *East Indian* at sixteen, and his *Monk* at twenty, but did little afterwards to maintain the reputation of his youth; Sir James Mackintosh, so brilliant when a boy, but who remained a "man of promise" to the end;* the poet Clough, whose reputation amongst his fellow-collegians was so much greater than his achievements as a man.

At the same time, in the case of many of the precocities cited in the preceding pages, the promise of their youth was amply fulfilled in their maturer manhood, and even in their old age. Though Handel composed a set of sonatas

* Daniel Schubart was the prodigy and genius of his school, but turned out one of the most erratic, tumultuous, and riotous literary men of his day. He was without habits of application, without principles, without judgment. He promised to be a great poet, author, critic, and musician; but all his promises failed. He threw away his gifts; his genius degenerated into profligacy, and he died wretched. Carlyle says of him: "Schubart had a quick sense of the beautiful, the moving, and the true; his nature was susceptible and fervid; he had a keen intellect, a fiery imagination, and his 'iron memory' secured forever the various produce of many gifts. But he had no diligence, no power of self-denial. His knowledge lay around him, like the plunder of a sacked city. Like this, too, it was squandered in pursuit of casual objects. He wrote in gusts; the *labor lineæ et mora* was a thing he did not know. Yet his writings have great merit. His newspaper essays abound in happy illustration and brilliant, careless thought. His songs, excluding those of a devotional and theosophic cast, are often full of nature, heartiness, and true simplicity. Hence their popularity, which many of them still retain" (*Life of Schiller*, Note A, ed. 1825).

† The causes of his failure are epitomized by Lady Holland in the memoir of her father, the Rev. Sydney Smith. "Sir James Mackintosh," she says, "went after a few days, leaving behind not only recollections, but a hat, books, gloves, papers, and various portions of his wardrobe, with characteristic carelessness. 'What a man that would be,' said my father, 'had he a particle of gall, or the least knowledge of the value of red tape. As Curran said of Grattan, he would have governed the world.'"

at ten, he had reached forty-eight before he gave the world assurance of a man. He was fifty-four when he wrote *Israel in Egypt*; fifty-seven when he wrote *The Messiah;* sixty-seven when he wrote *Jephtha;* and seventy-four when he wrote his "Wise men flattering" and "Sion now lies dead," for introduction to the *Judas Maccabeus.*

The great musicians were more or less precocious—Bach, Handel, Mozart, Beethoven, Weber, Mendelssohn, Meyerbeer, and Rossini,—the instances being very rare in which musical genius has not early displayed itself. Perhaps the only exception, and that only partially, was in the career of Spohr, whose works have been regarded as the mathematics of music. And yet he must have devoted much study to the violin when young, as he gave concerts on that instrument when in his twenty-first year. He did not begin to compose until his thirty-first year, after which he published many important works. The finest offsprings of Haydn's genius had their birth after he had become a sexagenarian. He wrote his *Creation* when he was sixty-five, and his *Seasons* two years later. His last composition, a quartette (Op. 8°), is perhaps the most original and exquisitely finished of all the works that proceeded from his pen. Rossini began early,—playing second horn to his father when only ten years old. He composed *Tancredi* at twenty-one, after which he produced a long succession of works, until he reached his last and greatest opera, *William Tell,* at the age of thirty-seven. With this he was supposed to have closed his musical career. To a friend he said: "An additional success would add nothing to my fame, a failure would injure it; I have no need of the one, and I do not choose to expose myself to the other." But after taking a long and indolent rest of about thirty-eight years, he composed his *Messe Solenelle* which some musicians consider to be his masterpiece, at the age of seventy-two.

In the sister arts of painting and sculpture, we find Michael Angelo, Leonardo da Vinci, and Titian, alike great in youth and in age. Michael Angelo began his "Last Judgment" in his fifty-eighth year, and finished the work in his sixty-sixth year. He was eighty-seven when he raised the cupola of St. Peter's. Though Titian was a painter of celebrity at twenty, he continued painting until he was ninety-nine, when he was cut off by the plague. When he was seventy-seven, he finished his "Last Supper," which had occupied him for seven years. Francia was among the few artists who discovered his genius late in life. He was nearly forty, when the sight of a picture by Perugino fired his mind, and determined him to become a painter.

Hobbes and Bentham, not unlike in character, were alike great in youth and in age. While yet a boy, Hobbes translated the *Medea* of Euripides into Latin verse. He learned much more easily, and before his twentieth year he was regarded as one of the most accomplished men of his time. In his fortieth year, he published a translation of Thucydides. At fifty-four, he wrote *De Cive,* originally published at Paris in Latin; and nine years later, the principles therein set forth were developed in his celebrated *Leviathan,* which appeared in English in his sixty-third year. He translated Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* when between seventy and eighty. Pope declares that the translation is "too mean for criticism." Yet Sir William Molesworth, who edited his works, thinks that "some readers may possibly find the unstudied and unpretending language of Hobbes. convey an idea less remote from the original than the smooth and glittering lines of Pope and his coadjutors." He lived to ninety-two, and even towards the close of his life his pen was never idle. The year before his death, he published his *Behemoth*—a history of the Civil Wars from 1640 to 1660,—a very notable work,