

CATO  
OR, AN ESSAY ON OLD AGE

by Cicero

translated by W. Melmoth

CATO

TO TITUS POMPONIUS ATTICUS.

Ah, could my numbers charm thy anxious breast  
And lull the sorrows of thy soul to rest;  
Would'st thou not deem the poet's lenient lay  
More worth than sums of countless gold could pay?

[Ennius, Ann. x.]

For well may I address you, my friend, in those lines of the  
honest bard,

Far less for wealth than probity renowned,  
with which he opens his poem inscribed to Flamininus. I am  
sensible at the same time that when the poet adds,  
Each rising sun beholds thy ceaseless grief,  
And night returning brings thee no relief.

he holds a language by no means applicable to you. I perfectly  
well know the moderation and equanimity you possess; and that you have  
derived from Athens, not only an honourable addition to your name, but  
that calm and philosophic spirit which so peculiarly distinguishes  
your character. Nevertheless, I have reason to believe that the  
present unpleasing posture of public affairs sometimes interrupts your  
tranquillity of mind; as it frequently, I confess, discomposes my own.  
But it is not my present purpose to offer you any consolation upon  
that subject: the case requires a very powerful application; and I  
will reserve what I have to say upon it to some future opportunity. My  
design at this time is only to communicate to you a few reflections  
concerning Old Age: the infirmities whereof we are now beginning to  
feel, or at least are advancing fast towards them: and I am desirous  
of rendering the burthen as easy as possible to you and to myself. I  
am well convinced indeed that as you have hitherto borne its weight,  
so you will continue to support its increasing pressure, with the same  
good sense and composure of mind which you have so happily  
discovered upon every other important occasion. However, having  
resolved to publish some reflections upon the subject, I determined to  
address them to you, who have a peculiar claim to this pledge of my  
affection: and it is a present to which we may both of us have  
recourse with equal advantage. For myself, at least, the  
considerations I now lay before you have had so happy an effect on  
my own mind, as not only to reconcile me to all the inconveniences  
of old age, but to render it even an agreeable state to me.

Can we sufficiently then express our sense of the obligations we owe  
to philosophy, who thus instructs her disciples how to pass through  
every successive period of human life with equal satisfaction and  
complacency? The advantages to be derived from her precepts, in  
other important situations, is a topic upon which I have frequently

had occasion to expatiate, and shall often perhaps resume: but in the papers I now send you, my purpose is to consider those advantages with respect only to our declining years. To have put these reflections into the mouth of an imaginary character, like the Tithonus of Aristo, would have made but little impression upon the reader: in order therefore to give them the greater force, I have represented them as delivered by the venerable Cato. To this end I have introduced Scipio and Laelius, as expressing to him their admiration of the wonderful ease with which he supported his old age: and this gives him occasion to enter into a full explanation of his ideas upon the subject. If you should think that he discovers, in this conversation, a richer vein of literature than appears in his own compositions, you must impute it to the acquaintance he afterwards made with the Greek authors, whose language and philosophy, it is well known, he passionately studied in the latter end of his long life. I have only to add, that in delivering the sentiments of Cato, I desire to be understood as fully declaring my own.

SCIPIO.- I have frequently, Cato, joined with our friend Laelius, in admiring that consummate wisdom and virtue, which upon all occasions so eminently distinguishes your character; but particularly, in that singular ease and cheerfulness with which you seem to bear up under those years which are pressing upon you. I could never observe that they are attended with the least inconvenience to you: whereas the generality of men, at your time of life, usually complain of old age as the heaviest and most insupportable of burthens.

CATO.- There is nothing, my friends, in the circumstance you have remarked, that can justly, I think, deserve your admiration. Those indeed who have no internal resource of happiness, will find themselves uneasy in every stage of human life: but to him who is accustomed to derive all his felicity from within himself, no state will appear as a real evil into which he is conducted by the common and regular course of nature. Now this is peculiarly the case with respect to old age: yet such is the inconsistency of human folly, that the very period which at a distance is every man's warmest wish to attain, no sooner arrives than it is equally the object of his lamentations. It is usual with men at this season of life to complain that old age has stolen upon them by surprise, and much sooner than they expected. But if they were deceived by their own false calculations, must not the blame rest wholly on themselves? For, in the first place, old age surely does not gain by swifter and more imperceptible steps on manhood, than manhood advances on youth; and in the next, in what respect would age have sitten less heavily upon them, had its progress been much slower, and, instead of making his visit at fourscore years, it had not reached them till four hundred? For the years that are elapsed, how numerous soever they may have been, can by no means console a weak and frivolous mind under the usual consequences of long life. If I have any claim therefore to that wisdom which you tell me, my friends, you have often admired in my character (and which I can only wish indeed were worthy of the opinion

you entertain of it, and the appellation the world has conferred upon me), it consists wholly in this, that I follow nature as the surest guide, and resign myself with an implicit obedience to all her sacred ordinances. Now it cannot be supposed that nature, after having wisely distributed to all the preceding periods of life their peculiar and proper enjoyments, should have neglected, like an indolent poet, the last act of the human drama, and left it destitute of suitable advantages. Nevertheless, it was impossible but that in the life of man, as in the fruits of the earth, there should be a certain point of maturity, beyond which the marks of decay must necessarily appear: and to this unavoidable condition of his present being, every wise and good man will submit with a contented and cheerful acquiescence. For to entertain desires repugnant to the universal law of our existence; what is it, my friends, but to wage war, like the impious giants, with the gods themselves?

LAELIUS.- You will confer, then, a very acceptable service on both of us, Cato (for I will venture to answer for my friend Scipio as well as for myself), if you will mark out to us by what means we may most effectually be enabled to support the load of incumbent years. For although we are at present far distant from old age, we have reason, however, to expect- at least to hope- that it is a period we shall live to attain.

CATO.- Most willingly, Laelius, I yield to your request, especially as you assure me that my compliance will be equally agreeable to both of you.

SCIPIO.- Yes, my venerable friend; like travellers who mean to take the same long journey you have gone before us, we should be glad (if it be not imposing too much trouble upon you) that you would give us some account of the advanced stage at which you are now arrived.

CATO.- I am ready, Scipio, to the best of my power, to give you the information you desire. And, indeed, I am the more qualified for the task you assign me, as I have always (agreeably to the old proverb) associated much with men of my own years. This has given me frequent opportunities of being acquainted with their grievances; and I particularly remember to have often heard Caius Salinator and Spurius Albinus (men of consular rank and nearly of the same age as myself) bewail their condition. The principal subject of their complaint was, in the first place, that they were no longer capable of enjoying the sensual gratifications without which, in their estimation, life was of no value; and in the next, that they found themselves neglected by those who had formerly paid their court to them with the greatest attention. But they imputed their grievances, I think, to a wrong cause. For had they arisen merely from the circumstance of their age, they would have been common to myself, and to every other man of the same advanced years. But the fact is much otherwise; and I have known many, at that period of life, who passed their time without the least repining- who neither regretted that they were released from the dominion of their passions, nor had

reason to think themselves treated with disrespect by any of their connections. In fact, the true grievance, in all complaints of this kind, lies in the man and not in the age. They whose desires are properly regulated, and who have nothing morose or petulant in their temper and manners, will find old age, to say the least of it, is a state very easily to be endured, whereas unsubdued passions and a froward disposition will equally embitter every season of human life.

LAELIUS.- Your observations, Cato, are undoubtedly just. Yet some, perhaps, may be apt to say, that your ample possessions, together with the power and influence of your rank and character, have very much contributed to soften the inconveniences of old age, and render it more than usually easy to you, but that these are advantages which cannot possibly fall to the lot of many.

CATO.- I must acknowledge that the circumstances you mention have some beneficial influence, but I can by no means admit that the whole depends upon them. When a certain native of the paltry island of Seriphos told Themistocles, in an altercation which arose between them, that he was indebted for the lustre of his fame not to the intrinsic splendour of his actions, but to the country in which he had the good fortune to be born. "It may be so," replied the Athenian general, "for if I had received my birth at Seriphos, I could have had no opportunity of producing my talents; but give me leave to tell you, that yours would never have made a figure though you had been born in Athens." The same sentiment is justly applicable to the case in question; for although it must be confessed that old age, under the pressure of extreme indigence, cannot possibly prove an easy state, not even to a wise and virtuous mind, yet without those essential qualities it must necessarily prove the reverse, although it should be accompanied with every external advantage. Believe me, my young friends, the best and surest guard against the inconveniences of old age, is to cultivate in each preceding period the principles of moral science, and uniformly to exercise those virtues it prescribes. The good seeds which you shall thus have sown in the former seasons of life will, in the winter of your days, be wonderfully productive of the noblest and most valuable fruit- valuable not only as a possession which will remain with you even to your latest moments (though, indeed, that circumstance alone is a very considerable recommendation), but also as a conscious retrospect on a long life marked with an uninterrupted series of laudable and beneficent actions affords a perpetual source of the sweetest and most exquisite satisfaction.

When I was very young I conceived as strong an affection for Quintus Maximus (the celebrated General who recovered Tarentum) as if we had been of equal years. There was a dignity in the deportment of this excellent old man, which was tempered with singular politeness and affability of manners, and time had wrought no sort of alteration in his amiable qualities. He was not, it is true, at a time of life which could properly be called infirm age when I first began to cultivate his friendship; but he was certainly, however, advanced in years,

for I was not born till the year before his first consulate. In his fourth, I served as a very young man in the army he commanded at Capua; and five years afterwards I was his Quaestor at Tarentum. From that post I succeeded to the Edileship; and four years after, in the consulate of Tuditanus and Cethegus, I was chosen Praetor. It was at this period that, by the advice and eloquence of my venerable friend, who was now become extremely old, the Cincian law concerning donatives was enacted. This great man led our troops to battle in his old age with as much spirit as if he had been in the prime and vigour of life; and when Hannibal, with all the gaiety of a youthful conqueror, was exulting in the success of his arms, he gave a check to his victories by a cool and patient perseverance in avoiding a general engagement. It is to this part of his judicious conduct that those famous lines of my friend Ennius allude:-

'Twas his to save the State by wise delay,  
Regardless what the censuring world might say.  
Time proves the merit of the glorious deed,  
His fame still rising as the years succeed.

How wonderful was the judgement he displayed, and the vigilance he exerted, in retaking the city of Tarentum! I remember when Salinator (who, after having been driven by the besiegers from the city, retired to the citadel) was boasting to Maximus, in my presence, that it was by his means he regained possession of the town. "Very true," replied Maximus, with a smile; "for if you had not lost it, I certainly could never have recovered it." Nor were his spirit and abilities more conspicuous as a soldier than a statesman. In his second consulship, when C. Flaminius, in direct opposition to the authority of the Senate, was dividing among the soldiers the conquered lands in the provinces of Gaul and Picentia, he had the courage singly, and unsupported by his colleague Carvilius, to withstand, as far as it was possible, the popular measures of that factious tribune. And even when he was Augur, he had the honest boldness, upon a particular occasion, openly to declare that "every omen ought to be considered as favourable or inauspicious, as the interest of the State determined."

But there is no trait among the many shining qualities which adorned this great man's character that I observed with warmer admiration than the fortitude with which he supported the death of his illustrious son. The funeral oration he pronounced upon that affecting occasion is in everybody's hands; and which of the philosophers, I will venture to ask, does not sink in our esteem after the perusing of this admirable performance? The truth is, it was not solely in the conspicuous paths of the world, and when he was acting in the public view, that this excellent man was truly great; he appeared still greater in the private and domestic scenes of life. How pleasing and instructive was his conversation! how profound his knowledge of antiquity! how deep his skill in the laws and institutions concerning augury! To which I may add, that he was better acquainted with the Grecian literature than is usual for a Roman. His memory,

too, was so remarkably faithful, that there was not a single event of any note that had happened in the wars, either with our neighbours in Italy or with the more distant nations, with which he was not perfectly well acquainted. In short, from my first connection with him, I as eagerly embraced every opportunity of enjoying his society as if I had then presaged, what the event has verified, that after his death I should never again meet with so wise and informing a companion.

I have entered thus minutely into the character and conduct of Maximus, in order to convince you that it would be an affront to virtue to suppose that old age, to a man endowed with such principles and dispositions, could possibly have been a state of infelicity. It must be acknowledged, at the same time, that it is not in every one's power to be a Maximus or a Scipio; to enliven the gloom of declining years by the animating recollection of the towns he has taken, the battles he has won, and the triumphs that have honoured his successful arms. But it is not the great and splendid actions of the hero or the statesman alone that lead to an easy and agreeable old age; that season of life may prove equally placid and serene to him who hath passed all his days in the silent and retired paths of elegant and learned leisure. Of this kind, we are told, was the old age of Plato, who continued to employ himself with great satisfaction in his philosophical studies, till death put an end to them in his eighty-first year. Such, too, was that of Isocrates, who is said to have composed his famous discourse, intituled "Panathenaicus," in the ninety-fourth year of his age, and his death did not happen till five years afterwards. His preceptor, Gorgias of Leontini, lived to complete his one hundred and seventh year, continuing his studies with undiminished spirit and application to his last moments. This celebrated veteran being asked, Why he did not put an end to such a tedious length of life? "Because," said he, "I find no reason to complain of old age"- an answer truly noble, and altogether worthy of a philosopher! They whose conduct has not been governed by the principles of wisdom and virtue are apt to impute to old age those infirmities for which their former irregularities are alone accountable. Far different were the sentiments of Ennius, whom I just now had occasion to quote; he compares his declining years to those of a generous steed:

Who victor oft in famed Olympia's fields,  
To sweet repose his age-worn members yields.

You are not too young, my friend, to remember the person of this veteran poet, for his death happened so late as the consulate of Caepio and Philippus, which is not more than nineteen years ago. And let me observe, by the way, notwithstanding I was at that time full sixty-five years of age, I spoke in defence of the Voconian law with great exertion of voice and vehemence of action. But I was going to remark that this venerable bard, who lived to seventy, bore up under age and indigence with such wonderful cheerfulness and good humour, that one would almost have imagined he derived even a satisfaction

from those circumstances which the generality of mankind look upon, of all others, as the most dispiriting and oppressive.

When I consider the several causes which are usually supposed to constitute the infelicity of old age, they may be reduced, I think, under four general articles. It is alleged that "it incapacitates a man for acting in the affairs of the world," that "it produces great infirmities of body," that "it disqualifies him for the enjoyment of the sensual gratifications," and that "it brings him within the immediate verge of death." Let us therefore, if you please, examine the force and validity of each of these particular charges.

"Old age," it seems, "disqualifies us from taking an active part in the great scenes of business." But in what scenes? let me ask. If in those which require the strength and vivacity of youth, I readily admit the charge. But are there no other; none which are peculiarly appropriated to the evening of life, and which, being executed by the powers of the mind, are perfectly consistent with a less vigorous state of body? Did Quintus Maximus, then, pass the latter end of his long life in total inactivity? Tell me, Scipio, was your father, and my son's father-in-law, the excellent Lucius Paulus, were the Fabricii, the Curii, and the Coruncanii, utterly bereaved of all useful energy when they supported the interests of the Republic by the wisdom of their counsels and the influence of their respectable authority? Appius Claudius was not only old, but blind, when he remonstrated in the Senate with so much force and spirit against concluding a peace with Pyrrhus, to which the majority of the members appeared strongly inclined. And upon this occasion it was that he broke forth into those animated expostulations which Ennius has introduced into his poem:-

Shall folly now that honoured Council sway,  
Where sacred wisdom's wont to point the way?

together with the rest of those spirited lines with which you are no doubt well acquainted. This celebrated harangue, which is still extant, Appius delivered seventeen years after his second consulate, between which and his first there was an interval of ten years, and prior to both he had exercised the office of Censor. It is evident, therefore, that he must have been a very old man at the time of the Pyrrhic war. And, indeed, the tradition received from our forefathers has always represented him as such.

It appears, therefore, that nothing can be more void of foundation than to assert that old age necessarily disqualifies a man for the great affairs of the world. As well might it be affirmed that the pilot is totally useless and unengaged in the business of the ship, because while the rest of the crew are more actively employed in their respective departments, he sits quietly at the helm and directs its motions. If in the great scenes of business an old man cannot perform a part which requires the force and energy of vigorous years, he can act, however, in a nobler and more important character. It is not by exertions of corporal strength and activity that the momentous affairs of state are conducted; it is by cool

deliberation, by prudent counsel, and by that authoritative influence which ever attends on public esteem, qualifications which are so far from being impaired, that they are usually strengthened and improved by increase of years. And in this opinion, my noble friends, I am persuaded I shall have your concurrence, unless, peradventure, you look upon me as an useless and idle member of the commonwealth, because after having regularly passed through the several gradations of military service, from the private soldier to the commander-in-chief, and been concerned in each of those capacities in a variety of engagements, both by sea and land, I now no longer lead forth our armies to battle. But if I forbear to enter personally into the fatigues of war, I represent to the Senate its most proper object, and point out in what manner the operations may best be carried on. In short, I am perpetually urging the expediency of declaring war against the Carthaginians, in order to anticipate them in those hostilities which they have long been meditating against us. As in truth I shall never cease to be apprehensive of that commonwealth till it shall no longer have any existence. And may the glory of extirpating that insidious State be reserved, Scipio, for your arms, that you may have the honour of accomplishing the great work which your illustrious ancestor so happily began! Thirty-three years have now elapsed since the death of that great man, but his virtues are still fresh on the minds of his fellow-citizens, and will be had in honourable remembrance throughout all generations. His death happened the year before I was elected Censor, and nine years after his second consulate, in which office he was chosen my colleague. But had the life of this excellent man been extended even through a whole century, can it be imagined that he would have considered the closing period of such honourable days as a state to be regretted? For it was not agility in the robust and manly exercises, or skill and prowess in the management of arms, it was his judgement, his counsel, and his authority alone which he would then have had occasion to display. If abilities of this latter kind were not the peculiar attributes of old age, our wise ancestors would not surely have distinguished the supreme Council of the State by the appellation of Senate. The Lacedaemonians, for the same reason, give to the first magistrates in their commonwealth the title of Elders. And, in fact, they are always chosen out of that class of men.

If you look into the history of foreign nations you will find frequent instances of flourishing communities, which, after having been well-nigh ruined by the impetuous measures of young and unexperienced statesmen, have been restored to their former glory by the prudent administration of more discreet years. "Tell me," says one of the personages in that dramatic piece of Naeivius, called the School, addressing himself to a citizen of a certain Republic, "tell me whence it happened that so considerable a State as yours has thus suddenly fallen to decay?" The person questioned assigns several reasons, but the principal is "that a swarm of rash, unpractised young orators had unhappily broken forth and taken the lead among them."



Temerity, indeed, is the usual characteristic of youth, as prudence is of old age.

But it is farther urged "that old age impairs the memory." This effect, I confess, it may probably have on those memories which were originally infirm, or whose native vigour has not been preserved by a proper exercise. But is there any reason to suppose that Themistocles, who had so strong a memory that he knew the name of every citizen in the commonwealth, lost his retentive power as his years increased, and addressed Aristides, for instance, by the appellation of Lysimachus? For my own part, I still perfectly well recollect the names, not only of all our principal citizens now living, but of their ancestors also. And I am so little apprehensive of injuring this faculty (as is vulgarly believed) by the perusing of sepulchral inscriptions, that, on the contrary, I find them of singular service in recalling to my mind those persons whom death hath long since removed from the world. In fact, I never yet heard of any veteran whose memory was so weakened by time as to forget where he had concealed his treasure. The aged, indeed, seem to be at no loss in remembering whatever is the principal object of their attention, and few there are at that period of life who cannot readily call to mind what recognisances they have entered into, or with whom they have had any pecuniary transactions. Innumerable instances of a strong memory in advanced years might be produced from among our celebrated lawyers, pontiffs, augurs, and philosophers; for the faculties of the mind will preserve their powers in old age, unless they are suffered to lose their energy and become languid for want of due cultivation. And the truth of this observation may be confirmed not only by those examples I have mentioned from the more active and splendid stations of the world, but from instances equally frequent to be met with in the paths of studious and retired life. Sophocles continued in extreme old age to write tragedies. As he seemed to neglect his family affairs whilst he was wholly intent on his dramatic compositions, his sons instituted a suit against him in a court of judicature, suggesting that his understanding was impaired, and praying that he might be removed from the management of his estate; agreeably to a custom which prevails likewise in our own country, where if a father of a family by imprudent conduct is ruining his fortunes, the magistrate commonly interposes and takes the administration out of his hands. It is said that when the old bard appeared in court upon this occasion he desired that he might be permitted to read a play which he had lately finished, and which he then held in his hand; it was his Oedipus in Colonos. His request being granted, after he had finished the recital he appealed to the judges whether they could discover in his performance any symptoms of an insane mind? And the result was that the court unanimously dismissed the complainants' petition.

Did length of days weaken the powers of Homer, Hesiod, or Simonides, of Stesichorus, Isocrates, or Gorgias? Did old age interrupt the studies of those first and most distinguished of the Greek

philosophers, Pythagoras or Democritus, Plato or Xenocrates? or, to descend into later times, did grey hairs prove an obstacle to the philosophic pursuits of Zeno, Cleanthes, or that famous stoic whom you may remember to have seen in Rome, the venerable Diogenes? On the contrary, did not all of these eminent persons persevere in their respective studies with unbroken spirit to the last moment of their extended lives?

But not to enter farther into the consideration of old age in respect to the nobler and more exalted application of the human faculties, I could name among my friends and neighbours in the country several men far advanced in life who employ themselves with so much industry and activity in the business of agriculture that they never suffer any of the more important articles of their husbandry to be carried on when they are not themselves present to supervise and direct the work. I will acknowledge, at the same time, that these spirited labours of the persons I allude to are not perhaps a matter of much wonder with regard to those objects of tillage which are sown and reaped within the year, as no man is so far advanced in age as not to flatter himself that he may at least survive to enjoy the benefit of the next harvest. But those rural veterans I am speaking of are occupied also in branches of husbandry, from which they are sure that they themselves cannot possibly live to derive the least advantage:-

The future shade for times unborn they raise,  
as my friend Caecilius expresses it in his play called The Youthful Companions. Agreeably to this generous principle, the oldest husbandman when he is asked, "to what purpose he lays out his labours in the business of planting?" may well reply, "In obedience to the immortal gods, by whose bountiful providence as I received these fields from my ancestors, so it is their will that I should deliver them down with improvement to posterity."

The poet's sentiment in the verse I just now repeated is far more just than in those lines he adds:-

Severe the doom that length of days impose!  
To stand sad witness of unnumbered woes,  
Ah, had old age no other ills in store,  
Too well might man its dire approach deplore;

for if long life may occasion our being the painful spectators of many calamities which an earlier death would have concealed from our view, it may equally afford us the satisfaction of seeing many happy events which could not otherwise have come within our notice. Not to mention that disagreeable scenes will unavoidably occur to the young no less than to the old. But the observation of my dramatic friend is still more unwarrantable when he farther declares that:-

Of all the ills which drooping eld await,  
'Tis sure the worst to stand the scorn, or hate,  
Of happier years. [Terence.]

Why should he suppose that old age necessarily lays us open to a mortification of this kind? As men of good sense in the evening of

life are generally fond of associating with the younger part of the world, and when they discover in them the marks of an amiable disposition, find a sort of alleviation of their infirmities in gaining their affection and esteem; so, on the other hand, well-inclined young men think themselves equally happy to be conducted into the paths of knowledge and virtue by the guidance and instruction of experienced age. For my own part, at least, I have reason to believe that my company is not less acceptable to you, my youthful friends, than yours most assuredly is to me.

But to resume the particular point under consideration. It appears that old age is so far from being necessarily a state of languor and inactivity that it generally continues to exert itself in that sort of occupation which was the favourite object of its pursuit in more vigorous years. I will add that instances might be produced of men who in this period of life have successfully applied themselves even to the acquisition of some art or science to which they were before entirely strangers. Thus Solon, in one of his poems written when he was advanced in years, glories that "he learnt something every day he lived." And old as I myself am, it is but lately that I acquired a knowledge of the Greek language, to which I applied with the more zeal and diligence, as I had long entertained an earnest desire of becoming acquainted with the writings and characters of those excellent men to whose examples I have occasionally appealed in the course of our present conversation. Thus Socrates, too, in his old age learnt to play upon the lyre, an art which the ancients did not deem unworthy of their application. If I have not followed the philosopher's example in this instance (which, indeed, I very much regret), I have spared, however, no pains to make myself master of the Greek language and learning.

The next imputation thrown upon old age is, that "it impairs our strength," and it must be acknowledged the charge is not altogether without foundation. But, for my part, I no more regret the want of that vigour which I possessed in my youth, than I lamented in my youth that I was not endowed with the force of a bull or an elephant. It is sufficient if we exert with spirit, upon every proper occasion, that degree of strength which still remains with us. Nothing can be more truly contemptible than a circumstance which is related concerning the famous Milo of Crotona. This man, when he was become old, observing a set of athletic combatants that were exercising themselves in the public circus: "Alas!" said he, bursting into a flood of tears and stretching forth his arm, "alas! these muscles are now totally relaxed and impotent." Frivolous old man; it was not so much the debility of thy body as the weakness of thy mind thou hadst reason to lament, as it was by the force of mere animal prowess, and not by those superior excellences which truly ennoble man, that thou hadst rendered thy name famous. Never, I am well persuaded, did a lamentation of this unworthy kind escape the mouth of Coruncanius, or Aelius, or the late Publius Crassus; men whose consummate abilities in the science of jurisprudence were generously laid out for the

common benefit of their fellow-citizens, and whose superior strength of understanding continued in all its force and vigour to the conclusion of their numerous years.

It must be confessed, however, that the powers of an orator (as his function cannot be successfully executed by the force of genius alone, but requires great exertion, likewise, both of voice and gesture) must necessarily become languid and enfeebled by age. Nevertheless, there is a certain sweetness of utterance which, I know not how, is not subject to be impaired by years, and this melody of voice (old as you see I am) I may venture to say I have not yet lost. There is, indeed, a species of calm and composed elocution extremely graceful and perfectly well adapted to advanced years, and I have frequently observed an eloquent old man captivate the attention of his audience by the charms of this soft and milder tone of delivery. But if age should render the orator unequal even to this less laborious application of his talents, they may still be usefully exerted. They may be employed in forming young men of genius (yourself, for instance, Scipio, or our friend Laelius) to a nervous and manly eloquence. And can there be a more pleasing satisfaction to an old man, than to see himself surrounded by a circle of ingenuous youths, and to conciliate by these laudable means their well-merited esteem and affection? It will not, I suppose, be denied that old age has at least a sufficient degree of strength remaining to train the rising generation and instruct them in every duty to which they may hereafter be called, and there cannot, certainly, be a more important or a more honourable occupation. Accordingly, I have always thought it a very considerable happiness to your relations, Cnaeus and Publius Scipio, together with your two grandfathers, Lucius Aemilius and Publius Africanus, that they were usually accompanied by a train of young nobles, who attended them for the advantage of their instructions. Indeed there is a satisfaction in communicating useful knowledge of every kind, which must render any man happy, how much soever time may have impaired the powers of his body, who employs the talents of his mind to so noble and beneficial a purpose.

But after all, this imbecility of body is more frequently occasioned by the irregularities of youth, than by the natural and unavoidable consequences of long life. A debauched and intemperate young man will undoubtedly, if he live, transmit weakness and infirmities to his latter days. The virtuous Cyrus, in the discourse which Xenophon relates he held when he lay on his death-bed, and which happened at a very late period of life, declares he had never perceived that his old age had been attended with any sensible decay. I perfectly well remember Lucius Metellus when I was a boy. Four years after his second consulate he was chosen chief pontiff, and he presided two and twenty years in the sacred college. This venerable personage preserved such a florid old age to his last moments as to have no reason to lament the depredations of time. If I were to mention myself as an instance of the same kind, it would be only taking an old man's allowed privilege. Homer, you know, represents Nestor, although his

years had extended even to the third generation, as frequently boasting of his extraordinary prowess. And, indeed, he might well be indulged in the vanity of being the hero of his own true tale; for, as the poet sings-

Words sweet as honey from his lips distilled.

And let me remark by the way, that in order to pour forth this mellifluous and persuasive eloquence great strength of body was by no means necessary; so much otherwise, that the celebrated general of the Grecian forces never wishes for ten Ajaxes, but for ten such officers as Nestor, to be secure of soon laying the walls of Troy level with the ground.

But I was going to observe that I am now in my eighty-fourth year, and I wish I had reason to boast with Cyrus that I feel no sensible decay of strength. But although I do not possess it in the same degree as when I made my first campaign in the Carthaginian war, in the course of which I was advanced to the rank of questor; or when, during my consulship, I commanded the army in Spain; or when four years afterwards I was military tribune at the battle of Thermopylae; yet I can with truth, you see, affirm that old age has not totally relaxed my nerves and subdued my native vigour. My strength has not yet been found to fail me, either in the Senate or the assemblies of the people, when my country or my friends, my clients or my hosts, have had occasion to require my service. The truth is I have never governed myself by the cautious maxim of that ancient proverb so frequently quoted, which says, "You must be old soon if you would be old long;" on the contrary, I would rather abate some years from that season of my life than prematurely anticipate its arrival. In consequence of this principle I have hitherto been always open to access whenever any person desired to be introduced to me for my advice or assistance in his affairs.

But you will tell me, perhaps, that my strength is much inferior to yours. Undoubtedly it is, and so is yours to that of Pontius the athletic centurion, but is he therefore a more valuable man? A moderate degree of force is sufficient for all the rational purposes of life, and whoever will not attempt to exert his particular portion farther than he is well able, will assuredly have no great cause to regret that he is not endued with a more considerable share. Milo is said to have walked the full length of the course at the Olympic games bearing the whole enormous weight of an ox upon his shoulders. Now tell me which would you choose to possess- this man's extraordinary powers of body or the sublime genius of Pythagoras? In a word, my friends, make a good use of your youthful vigour so long as it remains, but never let it cost you a sigh when age shall have withdrawn it from you; as reasonably, indeed, might youth regret the loss of infancy or manhood the extinction of youth. Nature conducts us, by a regular and insensible progression, through the different seasons of human life, to each of which she has annexed its proper and distinguishing characteristic. As imbecility is the attribute of infancy, ardour of youth, and gravity of manhood,

so declining age has its essential properties, which gradually disclose themselves as years increase.

I am persuaded, Scipio, I need not tell you what extraordinary things that ancient host of your ancestors, Massinissa, is still capable of performing. You have heard, no doubt, that although he is at this time ninety years of age, he takes long journeys, sometimes on foot and sometimes on horseback, without once relieving himself throughout the whole way by alternately changing from the one mode of travelling to the other; that he is so exceedingly hardy, that no severity of weather, when he is abroad, can induce him to cover his head; and that having preserved by these means a thin and active habit of body, he still retains sufficient strength and spirits for discharging in person the several functions of his royal station. I particularise these circumstances as a proof, that by temperance and exercise a man may secure to his old age no inconsiderable degree of his former spirit and activity.

If it must be acknowledged that time will inevitably undermine the strength of man, it must equally be acknowledged that old age is a season of life in which great vigour is by no means required. Accordingly, by the laws and institutions of our country, we who are advanced to a certain age are excused from those offices which demand robust powers to discharge. Far from being compelled to undertake what is beyond our force, we are not called upon to exert our strength even to its full extent. If it be alleged that there are numberless old men so totally worn out and decayed, as to be incapable of every kind of civil or social duty, it must be confessed there are; but may not this debility have arisen from an original weakness of constitution? a misfortune by no means peculiar to old age, but common to every period of human life. How great a valetudinarian was that son of Scipio Africanus, who adopted you for his heir; so great indeed, that he scarcely ever enjoyed a day of uninterrupted health. Had he been formed with a less delicate constitution he would have shone forth a second luminary of the Commonwealth, for with all the spirit and magnanimity of his illustrious father he possessed a more improved and cultivated understanding. What wonder then if age is sometimes oppressed with those infirmities from which youth, we see, is by no means secure!

As to those effects which are the necessary and natural evils attendant on long life, it imports us to counteract their progress by a constant and resolute opposition, and to combat the infirmities of old age as we would resist the approaches of a disease. To this end we should be regularly attentive to the article of health, use moderate exercise, and neither eat nor drink more than is necessary for repairing our strength, without oppressing the organs of digestion. Nor is this all: the intellectual faculties must likewise be assisted by proper care, as well as those of the body. For the powers of the body, like the flame in the lamp, will become languid and extinct by time, if not duly and regularly recruited. Indeed the mind and body equally thrive by a suitable exertion of their powers;

with this difference, however, that bodily exercise ends in fatigue, whereas the mind is never wearied by its activity. When Caecilius therefore represents certain veterans as "fit subjects for the comic muse," he alludes only to those weak and credulous old doting mortals, whose infirmities of mind are not so much the natural effect of their years as the consequence of suffering their faculties to lie dormant and unexerted in a slothful and spiritless inactivity. The fact in short is plainly this: as irregular indulgences of the amorous passions, although a vice to which youth is in general more prone than age, is a vice, however, with which those young men alone are infected who are unrestrained by principles of virtue; so that species of delirium which is called dotage, is not a common weakness incident to every old man in general, but to those only who have trifled away their frivolous days in idleness and folly. In support of this observation I will instance the venerable Appius. His family consisted of four sons, who were arrived at the state of manhood, and five daughters, together with a numerous train of clients and dependants; yet, far advanced as he was in years, and totally deprived of his sight, he would not commit the management of this very considerable household to any other hands than his own. And he was abundantly equal to the important charge, having kept the spring and energy of his mind in constant action, nor suffered himself tamely to sink down under the weight of incumbent years. In consequence of this spirited conduct he maintained a more than parental authority over his family; his commands were obeyed as so many imperial mandates. In fine, feared by his servants, revered by his children, and endeared to all, he exhibited in his house a striking specimen of that simplicity and good order, which so eminently distinguished the domestic economy of our forefathers. Age is truly respectable in the man who thus guards himself from becoming the property of others, vindicates his just rights, and maintains his proper authority to the last moments of his life.

As I love to see the fire of youth somewhat tempered with the gravity of age, so I am equally pleased when I observe the phlegm of age somewhat enlivened with the vivacity of youth; and whoever unites these two qualities in his character, may bear, indeed, the marks of years in his body, but will never discover the same traces in his mind. In pursuance of this maxim, I am now employed in adding a seventh book to my antiquities; in collecting all the ancient records I can meet with that relate to my subject; in finishing a revisal of the speeches I made in the several important causes in which I have been engaged; as also in drawing up some observations concerning the augural, pontifical, and civil law. And in order to exercise my memory, I practise the advice of the Pythagorean philosophers, by recalling to my mind every night all that I have said, or done, or heard, the preceding day. These are the employments by which I keep the faculties of my understanding in play, and preserve them in due vigour: employments in which I have little reason surely to lament the want of mere animal strength. Nor are my

occupations wholly confined to those of a sedentary nature: on the contrary, I not only assist my friends in the courts of judicature, but frequently too, uncalled upon, attend the senate, where I propose such measures for the consideration of that assembly as I have previously weighed and duly matured in my own thoughts. And these I support, not indeed by strength of voice and power of lungs, but by the better force of reason and argument. But were I so worn down by age as to be incapable of exerting myself in the manner I have mentioned, yet one satisfaction nevertheless would still remain with me; the satisfaction of meditating on these subjects as I lay on my couch, and of performing in imagination what I could no longer execute in reality. Thanks, however, to that regular and temperate course of life I have ever led, I am still capable of taking an active part in these public scenes of business. In fine, he who fills up every hour of his life in such kind of labours and pursuits as those I have mentioned, will insensibly slide into old age without perceiving its arrival; and his powers, instead of being suddenly and prematurely extinguished, will gradually decline by the gentle and natural effect of accumulated years.

Let us now proceed to examine the third article of complaint against old age, as "bereaving us," it seems, "of the sensual gratifications." Happy effect indeed, if it deliver us from those snares which allure youth into some of the worst vices to which that age is addicted. Suffer me upon this occasion, my excellent young friends, to acquaint you with the substance of a discourse which was held many years since by that illustrious philosopher Archytas, of Tarentum, as it was related to me when I was a young man in the army of Quintus Maximus, at the siege of that city. "Nature," said this illustrious sage, "has not conferred on mankind a more dangerous present than those pleasures which attend the sensual indulgences; as the passions they excite are too apt to run away with reason, in a lawless and unbridled pursuit of their respective enjoyments. It is in order to gratify inclinations of this ensnaring kind that men are tempted to hold clandestine correspondence with the enemies of the state, to subvert governments, and turn traitors to their country. In short, there is no sort of crimes that affect the public welfare to which an inordinate love of the sensual pleasures may not directly lead. And as to vices of a more private tendency- rapes, adulteries and every other flagitious violation of the moral duties- are they not perpetrated solely from this single motive? Reason, on the other hand," continued Archytas, "is the noblest gift which God, or nature, has bestowed on the sons of men. Now nothing is so great an enemy to that divine endowment, as the pleasures of sense. For neither temperance, nor any other of the more exalted virtues, can find a place in that breast which is under the dominion of the voluptuous passions. Imagine to yourself a man in the actual enjoyment of the highest gratification that his animal nature is capable of receiving; there can be no doubt that during his continuance in that state, it would be utterly impossible for him to exert any one power



of his rational faculties." From hence our philosopher inferred "that the voluptuous enjoyments are attended with a quality of the most noxious and destructive kind; since, in proportion to their strength and duration, they darken or extinguish every brighter faculty of the human soul."

Archytas expressed these sentiments in a conversation with Caius Pontius, father of that famous Samnite commander who obtained a victory over the consuls Spurius Postumius and Titus Veturius, at the battle of Caudium: and it was related to me by our faithful ally, and my very worthy host, Nearchus, of Tarentum. My friend assured me he received this account by tradition from his ancestors: and he added, that Plato was a party in this conversation. This circumstance is indeed by no means improbable; as I find that philosopher visited Tarentum in the consulate of Lucius Camillus and Appius Claudius.

The inference I mean to draw from the authority I have cited is, that if the principles of reason and virtue have not been sufficient to inspire us with a proper contempt for the sensual pleasures, we have cause to hold ourselves much obliged to old age at least, for weaning us from those appetites which it would ill become us to gratify. For the voluptuous passions are utter enemies to all the nobler faculties of the soul; cast a mist, if I may so express it, before the eye of reason, and hold no sort of commerce or communion with the manly virtues.

To illustrate the truth of this assertion by a particular instance, I will mention a fact concerning Lucius Flamininus, who was brother to that brave commander Titus Flamininus. It was with much regret that seven years after he had been raised to the dignity of consul, I found myself under the necessity of expelling him from the senate; but I thought his scandalous debaucheries ought not to pass without marks of public disgrace. This unworthy man when he commanded, during his consulship, our army in Gaul, was prevailed upon by his pathic at an entertainment, to put to death one of the prisoners who were in confinement for a capital offence; and this infamous act escaped with impunity during the time that his brother Titus was censor. But when I succeeded him in that office, neither myself nor my colleague Flaccus, could by any means be induced to think that so wanton and flagitious an instance of abandoned cruelty and lewdness ought to pass without severe and distinguished animadversion; especially as it reflected dishonour, not only on the base perpetrator himself, but in some measure too on the high office with which he was invested.

I have frequently heard from some of my friends who were much my seniors, a traditionary anecdote concerning Fabricius. They assured me, that in the early part of their lives they were told by certain very old men of their acquaintance, that when Fabricius was ambassador at the court of Pyrrhus, he expressed great astonishment at the account given him by Cineas, of a philosopher at Athens (for a philosopher, it seems, he styled himself), who maintained that the

love of pleasure was universally the leading motive of all human actions. My informers added that when Fabricius related this fact to Manius Curius and Titus Coruncanus, they both joined in wishing that Pyrrhus and the whole Samnite nation might become converts to this extraordinary doctrine, as the people who were infected with such unmanly principles could not fail, they thought, of proving an easy conquest to their enemies. Manius Curius had been intimately connected with Publius Decius, who in his fourth consulate (which was five years before the former entered upon that office) gloriously sacrificed his life to the preservation of his country. This generous patriot was personally known likewise both to Fabricius and Coruncanus, and they were convinced by what they experienced in their own breasts, as well as from the illustrious example of Decius, that there is in certain actions a natural grace and beauty that captivate by their intrinsic charms; and which, with a noble contempt of what the world calls pleasure, every great and generous mind will ardently and invariably pursue.

I have dwelt the longer upon this article, in order to convince you, that the little relish which old age leaves us for enjoyments of the sensual kind, in so far from being a just imputation on this period of life, that on the contrary it very considerably raises its value. If age render us incapable of taking an equal share in the flowing cups, and luxuriant dishes of splendid tables, it secures us too from their unhappy consequences- from painful indigestions, restless nights, and disordered reason. Accordingly, the divine Plato justly represents pleasure as the bait by which vice ensnares and captivates her deluded votaries. But if this enticement cannot always be resisted, if the palate must sometimes be indulged, I do not scruple to say that an old man, although his years will guard him from excess, is by no means excluded from enjoying, in a moderate degree, the convivial gratifications. I remember frequently to have seen, when I was a boy, that illustrious commander who obtained our first naval victory over the Carthaginians, the venerable Duilius, returning from evening entertainments of this festive kind, preceded by a considerable number of flambeaux and instruments of music. He seemed particularly fond of being distinguished by such a pompous and splendid train; and indeed he is the first instance of a man not invested with a public character, that ventured to appear with this sort of ostentatious parade, a privilege, however, which in consideration of his heroic achievements, he might well be allowed to assume.

But to pass from the practice of others to my own, I will acknowledge that I always took a singular satisfaction in frequenting the meetings of those little societies which are known by the name of confraternities, and which were first instituted when I was quaestor, on occasion of the statue of Cybele being received into our public worship. At the return of these anniversary assemblies I used to partake with my brethren of the society in their festive meals- never to excess, indeed; but, however, with a certain freedom

natural to the gay spirits which usually animate that period of life, and which gradually subside as more serious years advance. But the principal satisfaction I received from these entertainments arose much less from the pleasures of the palate than from the opportunity they afforded me of enjoying the company and conversation of a very large circle of my friends. Agreeably to this way of thinking our ancestors distinguished these kinds of amicable feasts by the name of convivial banquets, as being chiefly calculated for the more rational purposes of social and friendly intercourse; whereas the Greeks denominate them by a term expressive merely of eating and drinking, as if those two articles, which ought to be considered as the least and lowest objects of the meeting, were first and principal in their estimation. For my own part, I receive so much pleasure from those hours which are thus devoted to cheerful discourse, that I love to prolong my meals, not only when the company is composed of men of my own years (few of which, indeed, are now remaining), but when it chiefly consists of such young persons as yourselves; and I acknowledge my obligations to old age for having increased my passion for the pleasures of conversation at the same time that it has abated it for those which depend solely on the palate. I would not, however, be thought so professed an enemy to the latter as to deny that, within certain limits, they may very reasonably, perhaps, be indulged; and I declare, for the satisfaction of those who are unwilling to part with this kind of gratifications, that I do not find old age is a disqualification for the enjoyment of them. On the contrary, I take delight in joining those social parties where, agreeably to a good old custom instituted by our ancestors, a president of the club is appointed, and am much diverted to hear him deliver out his important edicts. I rejoice, too, in those moderate and refreshing cups which Socrates recommends in Xenophon's Banquet, and am well pleased with those artificial methods of cooling, or warming the wine, as the different seasons of the year invite. Even when I am in the country among my Sabine neighbours I allow myself the same kind of indulgences, as I every day add one to the number of their evening societies, which we generally lengthen out by a variety of amusing conversation till the night is far advanced.

If it be farther objected "that the pleasures of the senses are not so exquisite in old age as in youth," my answer is that neither is the inclination towards them equally strong; and certainly there can be no loss where there is no desire. Sophocles, when he was become old, being asked if he engaged in amorous commerce with the fair sex? "Heaven forbid!" replied the venerable bard; "and glad I am to have made my escape from the tyranny of so imperious a passion." The truth is, to be deprived of enjoyments of this kind may be an uneasy state perhaps to those who are stimulated by warm desires; but where the passion is sufficiently subdued and extinguished, the privation is more eligible than the fruition- if, indeed, one can properly be said to be deprived of a pleasure who is utterly void of all

inclination towards it. I maintain, therefore, that there is more satisfaction in being delivered from the dominion of this passion than in its highest gratification.

If it must be admitted that in the fine season of life the soul receives a stronger and more exquisite impression from the pleasures of the senses, it will also be admitted, in the first place, that these pleasures are in themselves but of little value; and in the next, that notwithstanding old age cannot enjoy them in their utmost extent and perfection, yet it is not absolutely, however, excluded from them. If a spectator who sits in the first row of the theatre enters more thoroughly into the beauties of Turpio's acting than he who is placed in the remotest ranks, the latter, nevertheless, is not totally debarred from all share in the entertainment. In the same manner, if youth holds a less obstructed communication with the sensual gratifications than the circumstances of age will admit, an old man, though not equally, perhaps, affected with delight, feels at least as quick a relish of them as is necessary to content his more subdued desires.

But whatever may be the condition of old age with respect to the instances I have been examining, inestimable surely are its advantages if we contemplate it in another point of view; if we consider it as delivering us from the tyranny of lust and ambition, from the angry and contentious passions, from every inordinate and irrational desire- in a word, as teaching us to retire within ourselves, and look for happiness in our own bosoms; if to these moral benefits naturally resulting from length of days be added that sweet food of the mind which is gathered in the fields of science, I know not any season of life that is passed more agreeably than the learned leisure of a virtuous old age.

It was thus, Scipio, that your father's intimate friend, Caius Gallus, employed himself to the very last moments of his long life; and I saw him expire, I had almost said, in measuring the distances of the heavenly orbs, and determining the dimensions of this our earth. How often has the sun risen upon his astronomical meditations? how frequently has the night overtaken him in the same elevated studies! And with what delight did he amuse himself in predicting to us, long before they happened, the several lunar and solar eclipses! Other ingenious applications of the mind there likewise are- though of a lighter nature, indeed- which may greatly contribute to enliven and amuse the concluding scene of human life. Thus Naevius in composing his poem on the Carthaginian war, and Plautus in writing his two last comedies, filled up the leisure of their latter days with wonderful complacency and satisfaction. I can affirm the same of our dramatic poet, Livius, whom I remember to have seen in his old age, for although the first play he brought upon the stage was in the consulate of Cento and Tuditanus, six years before I was born, yet his death did not happen till I was nearly arrived at manhood. To those venerable personages whom I have already named, I might add Licinius Crassus, celebrated for his consummate skill in the pontifical and

civil laws of his country, as also Publius Scipio, who very lately, you know, was elected chief pontiff. These, together with every one of the rest whom I have mentioned, I saw in the last period of life pursuing their respective studies with the utmost ardour and alacrity. But let me not forget to add to this memorable list the example of Marcus Cethegus, whom Ennius justly styled the "soul of eloquence," and whom I likewise saw in his old age exercising even his oratorical talents with uncommon force and vivacity.

Tell me now, can the gay amusements of the theatre, the splendid luxuries of the table, or the soft blandishments of a mistress, supply their votaries with enjoyments that may fairly stand in competition with these calm delights of the intellectual pleasures? pleasures which, in a mind rightly formed and properly cultivated, never fail to improve and gather strength with years. What Solon, therefore, declares in the verse I just now cited, that he "learnt something in his old age every day he lived," is much to his honour; as, indeed, to be continually advancing in the paths of knowledge is one of the most pleasing satisfactions of the human mind.

From the pleasures which attend a studious old age, let us turn our view to those which at that season of life may be received from country occupations, of which I profess myself a warm admirer. These are pleasures perfectly consistent with every degree of advanced years, as they approach the nearest of all others to those of the purely philosophical kind; they are derived from observing the nature and properties of this our earth, which yields a ready obedience to the cultivator's industry, and returns with interest whatever he deposits in her charge; if not always, indeed, with equal increase, yet always with some.

But the profit arising from this principle of fertility is by no means, in my estimation, the most desirable circumstance of the farmer's labours. I am principally delighted with observing the power, and tracing the process, of Nature in these her vegetable productions. Thus when the ground is sufficiently broken and prepared, the seedsman disseminates the grain, which is afterwards harrowed into the bosom of the earth, by the vital warmth and moisture of which it is gradually expanded and pushed forth into the green blade; this blade shoots up into a knotted stem, which is nourished and supported by the various fibres of the root. The stem terminates in the ear, wherein the grain is lodged in regular order, and defended from the depredations of the smaller birds by a number of little bearded spikes. And let me add (for I take great pleasure in bringing you acquainted with every article that contributes to soothe and alleviate my bending years) that I am particularly entertained with marking the growth of the vine, and following it in its progress from the seed-plot to its perfect maturity. Not to enlarge on that wonderful power with which Nature has endowed every species of the vegetable kingdom- of continuing their several kinds by their respective seeds, and which from the smallest grain, as the fig, or from little stones, as the vine, most amazingly swell into large trunks and branches- not to

dwell, I say, on this method of generation common to all the various tribes of plants on the face of the earth, is it possible to observe the different modes of propagating the vine by suckers, by layers, by the root, or by slips, without being affected with the most pleasing admiration? This shrub, which by its form is a trailing plant, must necessarily creep upon the ground, unless it be supported, for this reason. Nature has furnished it with little tendrils, which serve as a sort of claws to lay hold of whatever stands within its reach, in order to raise itself into a more erect posture. And here the art of the husbandman is required to check its luxuriant growth, to train the irregular and depending shoots, and to prevent them, by a judicious pruning, from running into wood. After the vines have undergone this autumnal dressing they push forth in spring from the joints of the remaining branches little buds, which are distinguished by the name of gems. From this gem the future grapes take their rise, which gradually increase in size by the nourishment they draw from the earth, in conjunction with the genial warmth of the sun. At their first appearance they are extremely bitter, but in process of time, and when duly matured, they acquire a most sweet and delicious flavour. In the meanwhile, being covered and guarded by the leaves, they receive a moderate degree of heat without being too much exposed to the solar rays.

There cannot, surely, be a landscape more pleasing to the eye, as well as more profitable to the owner, than a plantation of this kind. It is not, however, as I have already declared, the utility resulting from this species of agriculture with which I am principally charmed; the mere cultivation itself of this generous plant, and the observing of its nature and properties, abstracted from all considerations of emolument, afford me a most amusing occupation; in short, every circumstance that relates to the management of this useful shrub, the regular arrangement of the vine props, the forming of them into arcades, the pruning some of the branches, and fixing layers of others, are employments in which I take much delight. To this I may add the cutting of proper channels for supplying the plantation with water, the stirring of the earth round their roots, and the trenching of the ground- works which are in themselves extremely entertaining, and which greatly contribute at the same time to ameliorate and fertilise the soil. As to the advantage of manure (an article which Hesiod has not taken the least notice of in his poem on husbandry), I have sufficiently explained my sentiments in the treatise I formerly published on the same subject. Homer, however (who flourished, I am inclined to think, many ages before Hesiod), in that part of the *Odyssey* where he represents Laertes as diverting his melancholy for the absence of Ulysses by cultivating his little farm, particularly mentions the circumstance of his manuring it with compost.

But the amusement of farming is not confined to one species of agriculture alone, to the cultivation of vineyards or woodlands, of arable or meadow grounds; the orchard, the kitchen-garden, and the

parterre contribute also to diversify its pleasures- not to mention the feeding of cattle and the rearing of bees. And besides the entertainment which arises from planting, I may add the method of propagating trees by the means of engrafting, an art which is one of the most ingenious improvements, I think, that ever was made in the business of horticulture.

I might proceed to point out many other pleasing articles of rural occupations, if I were not sensible that I have already been too prolix. But if the love I bear to this agreeable art, together with that talkative disposition which is incident to my time of life (for I would not appear so partial to old age as to vindicate it from all the infirmities with which it is charged)- if I have dwelt longer, I say, upon this subject than was necessary, I rely, my friends, on your indulgence for a pardon. Suffer me, however, to add that Manius Curius, after having conquered the Samnites, the Sabines, and even Pyrrhus himself, passed the honourable remainder of his declining years in cultivating his farm. The villa in which he lived is situated at no great distance from my own, and I can never behold it without reflecting, with the highest degree of admiration, both on the singular moderation of his mind and the general simplicity of the age in which he flourished. Here it was, while sitting by his fireside, that he nobly rejected a considerable quantity of gold which was offered to him on the part of the Samnites, and rejected it with this memorable saying, "that he placed his glory not in the abundance of his own wealth, but in commanding those among whom it abounded." Can it be doubted that a mind raised and ennobled by such just and generous sentiments must render old age a state full of complacency and satisfaction?

But not to wander from that scene of life in which I am myself more particularly concerned, let us return to our farmers. In those good days I am speaking of, the members of the senate, who were always men advanced in years, were called forth from their fields as often as the affairs of the state demanded their assistance. Thus Cincinnatus was following his plough, when notice was brought to him that he was created Dictator. It was during his exercise of this high office that his master of the horse, Servilius Ahala, in consequence of the spirited orders he received from the Dictator, seized upon Spurius Maelius, and instantly put him to death before he had time to execute his traitorous purpose of usurping the reins of government. Curius, too, and all the rest of the venerable senators of that age, constantly resided at their villas. For which reason a particular officer was appointed (called a courier, from the nature of his employment) whose business it was to give them notice when there was a meeting of the senate.

Now tell me, my friends, could the old age of these respectable patriots, who thus amused their latter years in cultivating their lands, be justly deemed a state of infelicity? In my opinion, indeed, no kind of occupation is more pregnant with happiness; not only as the business of husbandry is of singular utility to mankind in

general, but as being attended also (to repeat what I have already observed) with peculiar and very considerable pleasures. I will add, too, as a farther recommendation of rural employment (and I mention it in order to be restored to the good graces of the voluptuous) that it supplies both the table and the altar with the greatest variety and abundance. Accordingly, the magazines of the skilful and industrious farmer are plentifully stored with wine and oil, with milk, cheese, and honey, as his yards abound with poultry, and his fields with flocks and herds of kids, lambs, and porkets. The garden also furnishes him with an additional source of delicacies; in allusion to which the farmers pleasantly call a certain piece of ground allotted to that particular use their dessert. I must not omit, likewise, that in the intervals of their more important business, and in order to heighten the relish of the rest, the sports of the field claim a share in the variety of their amusements.

I might expatiate on the beauties of their verdant groves and meadows, on the charming landscape that their vineyards and their olive-yards present to view; but to say all in one word, there cannot be a more pleasing nor a more profitable scene than that of a well-cultivated farm. Now old age is so far from being an obstacle to enjoyments of this kind that, on the contrary, it rather invites and allures us to the fruition of them. For where, let me ask, can a man in that last stage of life more easily find the comforts in winter of a warm sun or a good fire? or the benefit in summer of cooling shades and refreshing streams?

In respect to the peculiar articles of rural diversions, let those of a more firm and vigorous age enjoy the robust sports which are suitable to that season of life; let them exert their manly strength and address in darting the javelin, or contending in the race; in wielding the bat, or throwing the ball; in riding, or in swimming; but let them, out of the abundance of their many other recreations, resign to us old fellows the sedentary games of chance. Yet if they think proper even in these to reserve to themselves an exclusive right, I shall not controvert their claim; they are amusements by no means essential to a philosophic old age.

The writings of Xenophon abound with a variety of the most useful observations; and I am persuaded it is altogether unnecessary to recommend them to your careful perusal. In his treatise entitled "Oeconomics," with what a flow of eloquence does he break forth in praise of agriculture! an art above all others, you will observe, which he deemed worthy of a monarch's attention. In view to this, he introduces Socrates informing his friend Critobulus, that when Lysander of Lacedaemon, a man of great and eminent virtues, was deputed by the confederate states to the Court of Sardis with their respective presents to the younger Cyrus, that great prince, no less distinguished by his genius than by the glory of his reign, received him in the most gracious manner; and, among other instances of affability, conducted him to an enclosure laid out with consummate skill and judgement. Lysander, stricken with the height and regularity



of the trees, the neatness of the walks and borders, together with the beauty and fragrance of the several shrubs and flowers, expressed great admiration not only at the industry, but the genius that was discovered in the scene he was surveying; upon which the prince assured him that the whole was laid out by himself, and that many of the trees were even planted by his own hand. Lysander, astonished at this declaration from the mouth of a monarch whom he beheld arrayed in all the splendour of Persian magnificence, replied with emotion, "O, Cyrus, I am now convinced that you are really as happy as report has represented you; since your good fortune is no less eminent than your exalted virtues."

The good fortune to which Lysander alluded is an article of felicity to which old age is by no means an obstacle; as the pleasure resulting from every rational application of the intellectual faculties, but particularly from the study of husbandry is consistent even with its latest period. Accordingly tradition informs us that Valerius Corvus, who lived to the age of a hundred, spent the latter part of his long life in the cultivation and improvement of his farm. It is remarkable of this celebrated person that no less than forty-six years intervened between his first and his last consulship, so that his career of honours was equal to that period which our ancestors marked out for the commencement of old age. But his felicity did not terminate with his retiring from public affairs; on the contrary, he was in one respect at least even happier in the latter part of his life than when he filled the first offices of the state; as his great age, at the same time that it exempted him from the fatigue of bearing an active part in the administration of the commonwealth, added weight and influence to his general credit and authority.

The crown and glory of grey hairs is, indeed, that kind of authority which thus arises from a respectable old age. How considerable did this appear in those venerable personages- Caecilius Metellus and Atilius Calatinus! You remember, no doubt, the singular and celebrated eulogy inscribed on the monument of the latter: that "All nations agreed in esteeming him as the first of Romans." The influence he maintained over his fellow-citizens was certainly founded upon the most unquestionable claim, since his merit was thus universally acknowledged and admired. To the instances already mentioned, I might add our late chief pontiff Publius Crassus, together with Marcus Lepidus, who succeeded him in that dignity. And, if it were necessary, I might enlarge this illustrious list with the revered names of Paulus Aemilius, Scipio Africanus, and Fabius Maximus, the latter of whom I have already taken occasion to mention with peculiar esteem. These were all of them men of such approved and respected characters, that even their very nod alone carried with it irresistible authority. In a word, that general deference which is ever paid to a wise and good old man, especially if his virtues have been dignified by the public honours of his country, affords a truer and more solid satisfaction than all the pleasures which attend on the gay season of life.

But let it be remembered, my noble friends, that when I speak thus

advantageously of that portion of life we are now considering, I would be understood to mean only that respectable old age which stands supported on the firm foundation of a well-spent youth. Agreeably to this principle, I once declared upon a public occasion that "miserable indeed must that old man be whose former life stood in need of an apology"- a sentiment which, I had the satisfaction to observe, was received by the whole audience with uncommon applause. It is not merely wrinkles and grey hairs which can command that authoritative veneration of which I have been speaking. He alone shall taste this sweet fruit of revered age, whose former years have been distinguished by an uniform series of laudable and meritorious actions.

But besides those more important advantages I have already pointed out as attending an honourable old age, it may be further observed that there are certain customary deferences and attentions which, although they may be considered perhaps as common and insignificant ceremonials, are undoubtedly, however, very honourable marks of general respect. Observances of this kind are strictly practised in our own country, as indeed they likewise are in every other, in proportion to its advancement in civilised and polished manners. It is said that Lysander, whom I just now took occasion to mention, used frequently to remark that Lacedaemon, of all the cities he knew, was the most eligible for an old man's residence; and it must be acknowledged there is no place in the world where age is treated with so much civility and regard. Accordingly it is reported that a certain Athenian, far advanced in years, coming into the theatre at Athens when it was extremely crowded, not one of his countrymen had the good manners to make room for him; but when he approached that part of the theatre which was appropriated to the Lacedaemonian ambassadors, they every one of them rose up and offered him a place among them. Repeated claps of applause immediately ensued from the whole assembly; upon which one of the spectators remarked, "that the Athenians understood politeness much better than they practised it."

There are many excellent rules established in the Sacred College of which I am a member; one of these, as it relates to the particular circumstance immediately under consideration, I cannot forbear mentioning. Every augur delivers his opinion upon any question in debate according to his seniority in point of years; and he takes precedency of all the younger members, even although they should be in the highest degree his superiors in point of rank.

And now I will venture once more to ask if there is a pleasure in any of the mere sensual gratifications which can equal the satisfaction arising from these valuable privileges thus conferred on old age? To which I will only add that he who knows how to enjoy these honourable distinctions with suitable dignity to the conclusion of his days, may be considered as having supported his part on the great theatre of the world with uniform spirit and propriety, and not, like an unpractised player, to have disgracefully failed in the last finishing act of the drama.

I shall be told, perhaps, that if we look into the world, we shall

find "petulance, moroseness, and even avarice itself are infirmities which generally break out and discover themselves in old age." But the fact is, these moral diseases of the mind are rather the constitutional imperfections of the man in whom they reside, than necessary defects inseparable from the wane of life. Indeed, this peevishness of temper may- I will not say be justified- but certainly at least in some measure excused from that suspicion which old men are too apt to entertain of their being generally marked by the younger part of the world as objects of their scorn and derision. Add to this, that where the constitution is broken and worn out, the mind becomes the more sensible of every little offence, and is disposed to magnify unintentional slights into real and designed insults. But this captious and irritable disposition incident to this season of life may be much softened and subdued in a mind actuated by the principles of good manners and improved by liberal accomplishments. Examples of this kind must have occurred to every man's experience of the world, as they are frequently exhibited also on the stage. What a striking contrast, for instance, between the two old men in Terence's play called *The Brothers!* Mitio is all mildness and good humour; whereas Demea, on the contrary, is represented as an absolute churl. The fact, in short, is plainly this: as it is not every kind of wine, so neither is it every sort of temper, that turns sour by age. But I must observe at the same time there is a certain gravity of deportment extremely becoming in advanced years, and which, as in other virtues, when it preserves its proper bounds, and does not degenerate into an acerbity of manners, I very much approve. As to avarice, it is inconceivable for what purpose that passion should find admittance into an old man's breast. For surely nothing can be more irrational and absurd than to increase our provision for the road, the nearer we approach to our journey's end.

It remains only to consider the fourth and last imputation on that period of life at which I am arrived. "Old age, it seems, must necessarily be a state of much anxiety and disquietude, from the near approach of death." That the hour of dissolution cannot possibly be far distant from an old man is most undoubtedly certain; but unhappy indeed must he be, if in so long a course of years he has yet to learn that there is nothing in that circumstance which can reasonably alarm his fears. On the contrary, it is an event either utterly to be disregarded, if it extinguish the soul's existence, or much to be wished, if it convey her to some region where she shall continue to exist for ever. One of those two consequences must necessarily ensue the disunion of the soul and body, there is no other possible alternative. What then have I to fear, if after death I shall either not be miserable, or shall certainly be happy? But after all, is there any man, how young soever he may be, who can be so weak as to promise himself, with confidence, that he shall live even till night? In fact, young people are more exposed to mortal accidents than even the aged. They are also not only more liable to natural diseases,

but, as they are generally attacked by them in a more violent manner, are obliged to obtain their cure, if they happen to recover, by a more painful course of medical operations. Hence it is that there are but few among mankind who arrive at old age; and this (to remark it by the way) will suggest a reason why the affairs of the world are no better conducted. For age brings along with it experience, discretion, and judgement; without which, no well-formed government could have been established, or can be maintained. But not to wander from the point under our present consideration, why should death be deemed an evil peculiarly impending on old age, when daily experience proves that it is common to every other period of human life? Of this truth, both you and I, Scipio, have a very severe conviction in our respective families: in yours, by the premature decease of your two brothers, who had given their friends a most promising earnest that their merit would one day raise them to the highest honours of the state; and in mine, by the loss of my truly excellent son.

It will be replied, perhaps, that "youth may at least entertain the hope of enjoying many additional years; whereas an old man cannot rationally encourage so pleasing an expectation." But is it not a mark of extreme weakness to rely upon precarious contingencies, and to consider an event as absolutely to take place, which is altogether doubtful and uncertain? But admitting that the young may indulge this expectation with the highest reason, still the advantage evidently lies on the side of the old; as the latter is already in possession of that length of life which the former can only hope to attain. "Length of life," did I say? Good gods! what is there in the utmost extent of human duration that can properly be called long, even if our days should prove as numerous as those of Arganthonius, the king of the Tartessi, who reigned, as history tells us, eighty years, and lived to the age of a hundred and twenty? In my own opinion, indeed, no portion of time can justly be deemed long that will necessarily have an end, since the longest, when once it is elapsed, leaves not a trace behind, and nothing valuable remains with us but the conscious satisfaction of having employed it well. Thus, hours and days, months and years glide imperceptibly away—the past never to return, the future involved in impenetrable obscurity. But whatever the extent of our present duration may prove, a wise and good man ought to be contented with the allotted measure, remembering that it is in life as on the stage, where it is not necessary in order to be approved, that the actor's part should continue to the conclusion of the drama; it is sufficient, in whatever scene he shall make his final exit, that he supports the character assigned him with deserved applause. The truth is, a small portion of time is abundantly adequate to the purposes of honour and virtue. But should our years continue to be multiplied, a wise man will no more lament his entrance into old age than the husbandman regrets, when the bloom and fragrancy of the spring is passed away, that summer or autumn is arrived. Youth is the vernal season of life, and the

blossoms it then puts forth are indications of those future fruits which are to be gathered in the succeeding periods. Now the proper fruit to be gathered in the winter of our days is, as I have repeatedly observed, to be able to look back with self-approving satisfaction on the happy and abundant produce of more active years.

But to resume the principal point we were discussing. Every event agreeable to the course of nature ought to be looked upon as a real good, and surely none can be more natural than for an old man to die. It is true, youth likewise stands exposed to the same dissolution, but it is a dissolution contrary to Nature's evident intentions, and in direct opposition to her strongest efforts. In the latter instance, the privation of life may be resembled to a fire forcibly extinguished by a deluge of water; in the former, to a fire spontaneously and gradually going out from a total consumption of its fuel. Or to have recourse to another illustration, as fruit before it is ripe cannot, without some degree of force, be separated from the stalk, but drops of itself when perfectly mature, so the disunion of the soul and body is effected in the young by dint of violence, but is wrought in the old by a mere fulness and completion of years. This ripeness for death I perceive in myself, with much satisfaction; and I look forward to my dissolution as to a secure haven, where I shall at length find a happy repose from the fatigues of a long voyage.

Every stage of human life, except the last, is marked out by certain and defined limits; old age alone has no precise and determinate boundary. It may well therefore be sustained to any period, how far soever it may be extended, provided a man is capable of performing those offices which are suited to this season of life, and preserves at the same time a perfect indifference with respect to its continuance. Old age under these circumstances, and with these sentiments, may be animated with more courage and fortitude than is usually found even in the prime of life. Accordingly Solon, it is said, being questioned by the tyrant Pisistratus, what it was that inspired him with the boldness to oppose his measures, bravely replied, "My old age." Nevertheless, the most desirable manner of yielding up our lives is when Nature herself, while our understanding and our other senses still remain unimpaired, thinks proper to destroy the work of her own hand, as the artist who constructed the machine is best qualified to take it to pieces. In short, an old man should neither be anxious to preserve the small portion of life which remains to him, nor forward to resign it without a just cause. It was one of the prohibitions of Pythagoras "not to quit our post of life without being authorised by the Commander who placed us in it, that is, not without the permission of the Supreme Being."

The epitaph which the wise Solon ordered to be inscribed on his monument, expresses his wish that his death might not pass undistinguished by the sorrowful exclamations of his surviving friends. It was natural, I confess, to desire to be remembered with regret by those with whom he had been intimately and tenderly

connected; yet I am inclined to give the preference to the sentiment of Ennius, in those famous lines-

Nor loud lament nor silent tear deplore  
The fate of Ennius when he breathes no more.

In this poet's estimation, death, which opens the way to immortality, is by no means a subject of reasonable lamentation. The act of dying may indeed be attended with a sense of pain; but a pain, however, which cannot be of long continuance, especially to a man greatly advanced in years. And as to the consequence of death, it must either be a state of total insensibility, or of sensations much to be desired. This is a truth upon which we ought continually to meditate from our earliest youth, if we would be impressed with a just and firm contempt of death; as without this impression it is impossible to enjoy tranquillity. For as death is a change which, sooner or later, perhaps even this very moment, we must inevitably undergo, is it possible that he who lives in the perpetual dread of an event with which he is every instant threatened, should know the satisfaction of possessing an undisturbed repose and serenity of mind?

When I reflect on the conduct of Junius Brutus, who lost his life in the support of the liberties of his country; on the two Decii, who rushed to certain death from the same patriotic principle; on Marcus Atilius, who delivered himself up to the torture of a most cruel execution, that he might not forfeit his word of honour which he had pledged to the enemy; on the two Scipios, who, if it had been possible, would willingly have formed a rampart with their own bodies against the invasion of the Carthaginians; on Lucius Paulus, your illustrious grandfather, who by his heroic death expiated the ignominy we sustained by the temerity of his colleague at the battle of Cannae; on Marcus Marcellus, whose magnanimity was so universally respected that even the most cruel of our enemies would not suffer his dead body to be deprived of funeral honours- when I reflect, I say, not only on the generous contempt of life which these heroic personages exhibited, but that whole legions of our troops (particular instances of which I have produced in my treatise on Roman Antiquities) have frequently marched, with undaunted courage and even alacrity, to attacks from which they were well persuaded not one of them could live to return, it should seem there is little occasion to enlarge upon the contempt of death. For if the very common soldiers of our armies, who are frequently raw, illiterate young peasants, are thus capable of despising its imaginary terrors, shall old age, with all the superior advantages of reason and philosophy, tremble at the thoughts of its near approach?

The distaste with which, in passing through the several stages of our present being, we leave behind us the respective enjoyments peculiar to each, must necessarily, I should think, in the close of its latest period, render life itself no longer desirable. Infancy and youth, manhood and old age, have each of them their peculiar and appropriated pursuits. But does youth regret the toys of infancy, or manhood lament that it has no longer a taste for the amusements of

youth? The season of manhood has also its suitable objects, that are exchanged for others in old age; and these, too, like all the preceding, become languid and insipid in their turn. Now when this state of absolute satiety is at length arrived, when we have enjoyed the satisfactions peculiar to old age, till we have no longer any relish remaining for them, it is then that death may justly be considered as a mature and seasonable event.

And now, among the different sentiments of the philosophers concerning the consequence of our final dissolution, may I not venture to declare my own? and the rather, as the nearer death advances towards me, the more clearly I seem to discern its real nature.

I am well convinced, then, that my dear departed friends, your two illustrious fathers, are so far from having ceased to live, that the state they now enjoy can alone with propriety be called life. The soul, during her confinement within this prison of the body, is doomed by fate to undergo a severe penance. For her native seat is in heaven; and it is with reluctance that she is forced down from those celestial mansions into these lower regions, where all is foreign and repugnant to her divine nature. But the gods, I am persuaded, have thus widely disseminated immortal spirits, and clothed them with human bodies, that there might be a race of intelligent creatures, not only to have dominion over this our earth, but to contemplate the host of heaven, and imitate in their moral conduct the same beautiful order and uniformity so conspicuous in those splendid orbs. This opinion I am induced to embrace, not only as agreeable to the best deductions of reason, but in just deference also to the authority of the noblest and most distinguished philosophers. Accordingly, Pythagoras and his followers (who were formerly distinguished by the name of the Italic Sect) firmly maintained that the human soul is a detached part, or emanation, from the great universal soul of the world. I am further confirmed in my belief of the soul's immortality, by the discourse which Socrates, whom the oracle of Apollo pronounced to be the wisest of men, held upon this subject just before his death. In a word, when I consider the faculties with which the human mind is endowed; its amazing celerity; its wonderful power in recollecting past events, and sagacity in discerning future; together with its numberless discoveries in the several arts and sciences- I feel a conscious conviction that this active comprehensive principle cannot possibly be of a mortal nature. And as this unceasing activity of the soul derives its energy from its own intrinsic and essential powers, without receiving it from any foreign or external impulse, it necessarily follows (as it is absurd to suppose the soul would desert itself) that its activity must continue for ever. But farther: as the soul is evidently a simple uncompounded substance, without any dissimilar parts or heterogeneous mixture, it cannot therefore be divided, consequently it cannot perish. I might add that the facility and expedition with which youth are taught to acquire numberless very difficult arts, is a strong presumption that the soul possessed a considerable portion of knowledge before it

entered into the human form; and that what seems to be received from instruction is, in fact, no other than a reminiscence, or recollection, of its former ideas. This, at least, is the opinion of Plato.

Xenophon, likewise, represents the elder Cyrus, in his last moments, as expressing his belief in the soul's immortality in the following terms: "Oh, my sons, do not imagine when death shall have separated me from you that I shall cease to exist. You beheld not my soul whilst I continued amongst you, yet you concluded that I had one, from the actions you saw me perform; infer the same when you shall see me no more. If the souls of departed worthies did not watch over and guard their surviving fame, the renown of their illustrious actions would soon be worn out of the memory of men. For my own part, I never could be persuaded that the soul could properly be said to live whilst it remained in this mortal body, or that it ceased to live when death had dissolved the vital union. I never could believe either that it became void of sense when it escaped from its connection with senseless matter, or that its intellectual powers were not enlarged and improved when it was discharged and refined from all corporeal admixture. When death has disunited the human frame, we clearly see what becomes of its material parts, as they apparently return to the several elements out of which they were originally composed; but the soul continues to remain invisible, both when she is present in the body, and when she departs out of it. Nothing so nearly resembles death as sleep, and nothing so strongly intimates the divinity of the soul as what passes in the mind upon that occasion. For the intellectual principle in man, during this state of relaxation and freedom from external impressions, frequently looks forward into futurity, and discerns events ere time has yet brought them forth- a plain indication this what the powers of the soul will hereafter be, when she shall be delivered from the restraints of her present bondage. If I should not therefore be mistaken in this my firm persuasion, you will have reason, my sons, when death shall have removed me from your view, to revere me as a sacred and celestial spirit. But although the soul should perish with the body, I recommend it to you, nevertheless, to honour my memory with a pious and inviolable regard, in obedience to the immortal gods, by whose power and providence this beautiful fabric of the universe is sustained and governed." Such were the sentiments of the dying Cyrus; permit me now to express my own.

Never, Scipio, can I believe that your illustrious ancestors, together with many other excellent personages, whom I need not particularly name, would have so ardently endeavoured to merit the honourable remembrance of posterity, had they not been persuaded that they had a real interest in the opinion which future generations might entertain concerning them. And do you imagine, my noble friends (if I may be indulged in an old man's privilege to boast of himself), do you imagine I would have undergone those labours I have sustained, both in my civil and military employments, if I had



supposed that the conscious satisfaction I received from the glory of my actions was to terminate with my present existence? If such had been my persuasion, would it not have been far better and more rational to have passed my days in an undisturbed and indolent repose, without labour and without contention? But my mind, by I know not what secret impulse, was ever raising its views into future ages, strongly persuaded that I should then only begin to live when I ceased to exist in the present world. Indeed, if the soul were not naturally immortal, never, surely, would the desire of immortal glory be a passion which always exerts itself with the greatest force in the noblest and most exalted bosoms.

Tell me, my friends, whence it is that those men who have made the greatest advances in true wisdom and genuine philosophy are observed to meet death with the most perfect equanimity; while the ignorant and unimproved part of our species generally see its approach with the utmost discomposure and reluctance? Is it not because the more enlightened the mind is, and the farther it extends its view, the more clearly it discerns in the hour of its dissolution (what narrow and vulgar souls are too short-sighted to discover) that it is taking its flight into some happier region?

For my own part, I feel myself transported with the most ardent impatience to join the society of my two departed friends, your illustrious fathers, whose characters I greatly respected, and whose persons I sincerely loved. Nor is this, my earnest desire, confined to those excellent persons alone with whom I was formerly connected; I ardently wish to visit also those celebrated worthies, of whose honourable conduct I have heard and read much, or whose virtues I have myself commemorated in some of my writings. To this glorious assembly I am speedily advancing; and I would not be turned back in my journey, even upon the assured condition that my youth, like that of Pelias, should again be restored. The sincere truth is, if some divinity would confer upon me a new grant of my life, and replace me once more in the cradle, I would utterly, and without the least hesitation, reject the offer; having well-nigh finished my race, I have no inclination to return to the goal. For what has life to recommend it? Or rather, indeed, to what evils does it not expose us? But admit that its satisfactions are many, yet surely there is a time when we have had a sufficient measure of its enjoyments, and may well depart contented with our share of the feast; for I mean not, in imitation of some very considerable philosophers, to represent the condition of human nature as a subject of just lamentation. On the contrary, I am far from regretting that life was bestowed upon me, as I have the satisfaction to think that I have employed it in such a manner as not to have lived in vain. In short, I consider this world as a place which nature never designed for my permanent abode, and I look upon my departure out of it, not as being driven from my habitation, but as leaving my inn.

O, glorious day, when I shall retire from this low and sordid scene, to associate with the divine assembly of departed spirits, and not

with those only whom I just now mentioned, but with my dear Cato, that best of sons and most valuable of men. It was my sad fate to lay his body on the funeral pile, when by the course of nature I had reason to hope he would have performed the same last office to mine. His soul, however, did not desert me, but still looked back upon me in its flight to those happy mansions, to which he was assured I should one day follow him. If I seemed to bear his death with fortitude, it was by no means that I did not most sensibly feel the loss I had sustained; it was because I supported myself with the consoling reflection that we could not long be separated.

Thus to think and thus to act has enabled me, Scipio, to bear up under a load of years with that ease and complacency which both you and Laelius have so frequently, it seems, remarked with admiration; as indeed it has rendered my old age not only no inconvenient state to me, but even an agreeable one. And after all should this my firm persuasion of the soul's immortality prove to be a mere delusion, it is at least a pleasing delusion, and I will cherish it to my latest breath. I have the satisfaction in the meantime to be assured that if death should utterly extinguish my existence, as some minute philosophers assert, the groundless hope I entertained of an after-life in some better state cannot expose me to the derision of these wonderful sages, when they and I shall be no more. In all events, and even admitting that our expectations of immortality are utterly vain, there is a certain period, nevertheless, when death would be a consummation most earnestly to be desired. For Nature has appointed to the days of man, as to all things else, their proper limits, beyond which they are no longer of any value. In fine, old age may be considered as the last scene in the great drama of life, and one would not, surely, wish to lengthen out his part till he sank down sated with repetition and exhausted with fatigue.

These, my noble friends, are the reflections I had to lay before you on the subject of old age, a period to which, I hope, you will both of you in due time arrive, and prove by your own experience the truth of what I have asserted to you on mine.

THE END OF CATO OR, AN ESSAY ON OLD AGE

