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When Men Grow Old, 1951.

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WHEN MEN GROW OLD

January 7, 1951

My dear friends, growing up is always a difficult problem, involving, as it does, serious and at times rather painful adjustments. Growing pains are not limited to childhood or adolescence. They go also with growing up into middle age and old age. Physiological, mental and emotional changes attend each and every decisive age in a man and woman, and the human organism does not easily adjust itself to new and drastic changes. It is not any easier to find and to follow the proper way of life - that is, the self-satisfying and at the same time the socially acceptable way of life - I say, it is not any easier to find that way of life in old age than it is in boyhood or adolescence or middle age. Growing old gracefully and usefully requires as much education and self-discipline as growing up into fine and useful young manhood and womanhood. It just does not come of itself. The sheer accumulation of years does not bring with it automatically either insight or judgment or kindness or tolerance.

While we are admonished in our sacred literature to respect all old age

"one must rise before the aged"

"and one should pay rever-

ence to the old" for in so doing we show our reverence for life itself which, even in its declining years, is worthy of our respect. But it is especially old age which represents the harvested wisdom and experience of a long life that we are asked to honor.

"who is really an old man worthy of our tribute and reverence"

"he who has acquired wisdom".

The sages and the religious leaders and the legislators among our people in ancient times were known as the "the elders", for they were chosen on the basis of their experience, their knowledge and contact with life, which come only with years. It might interest you to know that the ancient Senate of Rome derived its name from "senes", the elders. It was a chamber, an assembly, of the elders of the people, men who were selected because of the wisdom which years brought to them. One might not

think of it when one speaks of the Senate of the United States, but that's where it got its name.

Though years by themselves do not bring wisdom and judgment and kindness, someone has tartly put it, "A young fool will grow up to be an old fool, except he bless the community by dying early a damn fool."

There are old people who would like to command respect and tyrannize over those around them on the authority of their gray hair. That is a great pity, for they seldom succeed. At best, they obtain a grudging and resentful concurrence - not love nor affection nor respect. These cannot be commanded at all. They go out spontaneously to those who have merited them by the quality of their living through the long years and by what they have come to represent in their old age of wisdom and influence and goodness and attractiveness. "Honorable age," we read in the Apocrypha, the book of wisdom, "is not that which standeth in length of time, nor that is measured by number of years. But wisdom is the gray hair unto man, and an unspotted life is old age."

A good old age, dear friends, must be prayed for and saved for and built for. Let me repeat. A good old age must be prayed for and saved for and built for.

Commenting on the verse in the Book of Psalms, "For this let every good man pray unto God." The Rabbis said "this" refers to the days of our old age. This is what we should pray for. For old age does not always bring that peace and serenity that men hope for, even when it is free from physical ailment and economic dependency. Old age is often a sad, distraught and embittered age of lonely and of empty years.

Cicero, many many years ago, wrote a remarkable essay on old age, "De Senectute", which bears reading and re-reading even in our day by young and old. In that superb essay on old age, Cicero writes of some people who, like skillful actors, play their parts well in the drama of life to the very end, while others, like untrained players, break down in the last act. So many unfortunate men and women break down in the last act - the last act which should really be the triumphant climax of their life's drama.

Yes, we must pray for a good old age, and we must save for it. Dependency - dependency in one form or another is a curse of old age. Our industrial system is ruth-

less with aging men and women. Many industries in normal times are reluctant to employ men, even men above 50. The economic productive years of a man and of a woman are thus sharply limited, while the span of their life - the span of all life in this country - is steadily increasing. According to an article which I read recently in one of our periodicals, it is estimated that by 1975 - that is, within the next 25 years - there will be 20 million people in the United States over 65. There are today $11\frac{1}{2}$ million people in our country over 65. And in this article it is stated that "in 1870 eight out of every ten men 65 or more were gainfully employed. Today the figure is not much more than 4 out of 10."

First of all, therefore, until this trend is reversed, if it is ever reversed, economic security must be accorded to men and women to save them from the indignities and the misery of economic dependency in old age. The average income of the American home during the productive years of its wage earners, high as it is - possibly the highest in the world - is not such as to provide for adequate security or insurance for old age. And pensions and social security have so far been quite inadequate for the many who stand in need of it. Our social security payments have been averaging, according to the latest statistics, only about \$36 a month to single persons and \$41 a month to married people. And it has been conservatively estimated that the costs of meeting the needs of an elderly couple - the basic needs, the indispensable needs of an elderly couple - it has been estimated at about \$140 a month.

Now in my humble judgment, and I think that you will agree with me that a nation that can pour out so many billions of dollars to prepare for war and to prepare other nations for war, or as doles and grants to other nations all over the world, ought first of all to look after the proper care of its own citizens, who should not be thrown upon the economic scrap heap in their aging years and be consigned to penury and want in those years when they should be enjoying the reward of a life-time of labor and service. So that where it is impossible for the individual to save for his old age, the state should. But better by far, if the individual can save for himself. And they are many, many who can save during their earning years, but who do not! They

are improvident and thriftless and carelessly and recklessly spend in their young years what they will desperately need in their older years.

We must save for old age, but not only in economic sense; in yet another sense! We must conserve ourselves - our strength, our energies. We must not consume ourselves, burn up, as it were, either in excessive and undermining pursuits of pleasures and over-indulgence or in excessive and impatient ambition in trying to do too much too quickly, and so either die before our time or come down the end of the road utterly spent and exhausted, a panting defunct! Men and women should ask themselves in the active years, "What will I need for my old age? What of my strength, of my energy, not only of physical substance? What will I need for my old age?"

What I just said now is so true in our civilization of so many businessmen and executives and professional men who "speed up" dangerously and foolishly as if life were some furious race track down which one must race ahead of everybody else, instead of looking upon life as an unhurried pilgrimage along a road where there is much beauty to be seen by the more leisurely traveler - pleasant friendships and warm companionship to be found, and where rich insights and wisdom can be garnered. Such men, of whom I am speaking, even if they succeed in achieving their material ambitions, bring to their old age, if they live that long, only money, and money is not enough to insure a good old age. The Rabbis state "an old age in which one can still be creatively active, have reserve power, freshness, vigor in man's spirit and soul - creative power, the possibility for creative activity. And one can be creatively active in old age; definitely, one can be. It is nonsense to maintain that old men and women, just because they cannot do as well the same kind of work that young men and women are doing, are, therefore, incapable of useful, important and creative work. It's sheerest nonsense. Each age has its appropriate strength. Each age has its appropriate opportunities. There are different kinds of strengths in the long range of human life. Each is valuable to society.

I want to read this one quotation from "De Senectute" which so clearly illustrates this point which I am endeavoring to make and which so many people overlook:

Cicero makes, Cato, the elder, say these words:

Those, therefore, who allege that old age is devoid of useful activity adduce nothing to the purpose, and are like those who would say that the pilot does nothing in the sailing of the ship, because, while others are climbing the masts, or running about the gangways, or working at the pumps, he sits quietly in the stern and simply holds the tiller. He may not be doing what younger members of the crew are doing, but what he does is better and much more important. It is not by muscle, speed or physical dexterity that great things are achieved, but by reflection, force of character, and judgment; in these qualities old age is usually not only not poorer, but is even richer.

There are many places in the business and the professional world - there are many situations in the affairs of the home, of the community, of the nation where the essential requirements are not so much energy and the enterprise of youth, not so much drive and action which call for maximum physical vigor, but where the essential requirement is experience, wisdom, prudence, judgment and a long acquaintance with life and men and the ways of the world, which come with age, and it is folly to sacrifice one for the other when society requires both. We can say then that it is altogether unfounded to maintain that creative thinking, initiative, intellectual enterprise, pioneering mentally, is affected by old age. Dr. Edward Stieglitz, who wrote a very helpful book which I would recommend to you called "The Second Forty Years", quotes from a study which was made at Ohio University by Professor Harvey Lehman, the psychologist, who "has been for some years been analyzing the relation of age to ability in creative thinking as revealed by accomplishments in scientific research and productivity in original work in the graphic, musical, and literary Arts. His vast collection of data shows that there exists so great a variation of the age at which different individuals produced their greatest contributions that no general correlation with age is justified. Genius may appear early or it may remain hidden until late in life. Intellectual maturity may be ~~px~~ rapid or it may be slow. Sometimes the peak is reached in youth, sometimes development continues even into late senility. Such examples as Titian, Goethe, Holmes and many others who were at their peak late in life are too well known to require more than passing mention."

Not only is the power of creative thinking not necessarily affected by old age, but the capacity to learn, to learn new things - that, too, is not affected by old age. The rate of learning may, in some instances, be somewhat affected, and that is due largely to complacency which comes with old age, and the lack of desire to make the effort. As the author says, "The old dog will learn new tricks only if he really wants to."

Older men and women can be profitably employed in business and industry, in professional and governmental posts - in fact, everywhere - where their special experience and insights and know-how and equipment can be of use. It is not only a wrong, a grave wrong, done to the individual, but it is also a distinct social loss to set up an artificial date-line, an artificial deadline, upon the careers of men and women, say at 60 or 65, and to declare that beyond that they can no longer be economically useful. Their usefulness is at an end.

Now, those men and women who need not be gainfully employed in their old age should nevertheless make sure that they are usefully employed. The real tragedies of old age are uselessness and boredom. The way to escape uselessness is to make one's self useful. There are a thousand ways in which any human being at any age can make himself useful - in the home, the community, the church, Temple, in organizational life - and no way is unimportant if it is constructive and useful. One need not be doing the dramatic things and the publicized things in his community. Real life, my dear friends, and the real business of life, is not made up of the unusual and the heralded and the acclaimed things, but of the quiet, simple, day-by-day chores of helpfulness and usefulness, and anyone who wants to be useful, anyone who wants to do real helpful work will have no trouble finding it. And old men and women require it for the salvation of their lives.

The way to escape boredom is keep one's self occupied in worth-while pursuits. I use the word, pursuit, for old age can have it pursuits quite as much as youth. To keep one's self occupied in worthless activity is not to escape boredom; it is just to camouflage it, because it does not stimulate the mind and satisfy the soul. To be

happy in any stage of life, one needs a real interest, an absorbing and enriching, un-failing interest. Such an interest should be a continuation and a carry-over from earlier years, but it is even possible to begin and experiment with new interests in old age, and find great delight and satisfaction in them. There are interests which you could not pursue when you were younger, ^{even} if you wanted to. There are aptitudes in you which you suspected to be in you but which you were unable to explore in your earlier years. There were perhaps inclinations towards art and music or drawing or painting or modelling or literature or gardening or woodwork or sewing or a thousand other activities. It were wise to set one's mind and hand and heart on one or more of these useful and creative activities. The heart will become younger, the days will become brighter. I believe it was Leonardo da Vinci who said, "Learning keeps the soul young and decreases the bitterness of old age."

And our own Rabbis said, "all students, the older they get," "their minds become clearer and more luminous and more content." The Hebrew word for a scholar is a very interesting one called . The doesn't really mean anyone with accumulated knowledge. "Talmid" was a pupil; is a wise seeker after knowledge, one who makes it his business of living to learn more and more and more, to broaden his intellectual life, "in youth, maturity and old age"

"real seekers after knowledge have no retirement."

"A fatal thing for a human being is retirement. Retirement is the badge of death." You may change from one field to another, from one phase of seeking knowledge to another, yet to speak of retirement is to speak of death - of retirement of body and mind soul - is a quick preparation for the grave.

Old age, therefore, my friends, should be prayed for and saved for and built for. We must build wisely throughout our days for old age and lay its sound foundations in youth. You build up to a good old age. Honest craftsmanship, faithful industry, good material and sound planning in our earlier years will give us a sound and pleasant habitation to dwell in in our old age.

Where there has been little sowing and planting and little care and tending and poor husbandry through the earlier years, there will be a poor harvest when the cycle of our years draws to a close. "If thou hast gathered ~~nothing~~ nothing in thy youth," we read this morning out of the Apocrypha, "how canst thy find anything in thine age?"

Many friends we want in old age. Many old people are lonely, but to have friends in old age we must cultivate them early. To have labored for ourselves only through life is to be left lonely in old age. To have been contentious and ruthless and thoughtless in our earlier years is to find ourselves ingrown, cantankerous, sour in our old age. To be an influence in old age - and the crowning glory of old age is influence - we must accumulate a credit and a reputation for soundness and justice and fairness and dependability in our earlier years. We must develop a taste and an appreciation for art and literature and music, for the things of the mind and the spirit, if we want them to be our pleasant companions in our declining years. The point that I'm making, dear friends, is that everything in life requires preparation and everything must be earned. A good old age must be prepared for and must be earned. We must prepare for life even as we must prepare for death if we wish to outlive our mortal frame and earn immortality.

Thus prepared, prayed for, saved for, built for, old age may become what the Book of Proverbs says of it: "Old age is the crown of glory." "As the clear light is upon the holy candlestick, so is the beauty of the face in ripe age" for it shines with the effulgence of an inner light, a light that time cannot dim, a light that never fails.

When we think of the theme, "When Men Grow Old," it is well to think of these things, of how we may prepare ourselves for a good old age.