

## Concerning Old Age.

BY J. B. GAMBRILL.

Every period of life has its blessings, its trial and its perils. Old age is the culmination of life and is peculiarly fraught with everything that concerns life. It needs to be specially guarded, and there is, perhaps, no way to make sure of a dignified old age, except by putting up the safe-guards in advance.

The Scripture speaks very guardedly of gray hairs. They are a crown of glory, if found in the way of righteousness, otherwise they are a badge of shame. There is not among men a sadder spectacle than an old, gray-haired, vulgar, profane, and godless man. There is nothing more dignified and honorable than a gray-haired man of genuine character, amiable in disposition and standing for all that is best in life.

It is not particularly the intention of this article to speak of the pleasures of old age. If this period of life has followed many years of usefulness and honorable living, it should be full of happiness. If the old are permitted to see their children grow up useful and prosperous, they have abundant reason to be happy. Nor is it denied to the old to be useful and bear fruit, in old age, though the manner of service will often have to be changed and suited to falling strength and, perhaps, of mind also.

It lies more particularly in the scope of this article to speak of the perils of age. There is a philosophy of life which age illustrates. I state it in brief. The most enduring things in life are the things that enter life early. The oak grows by layers. The defects in the sapling are preserved in the heart of the great oak, the wood having been laid over these defects, layer by layer, as the years have come and gone. Many of the early defects of life are overlaid and hidden, as people take on strength and through force of circumstances are pressed into an ennobling course of life. We merge from helpless fancy, and by degrees we go over the line which divides between being served and serving. The things that are in early life remain through all the changes, though, perhaps, covered up. The proverb says, "Train up a child in the way he should go and when he is old he will not depart from it." What he may do in middle age the proverb does not say. In age the early training will reassert itself.

The predominant passion through early and middle life is apt to be the predominant passion in age, and this fact accounts for one of the special perils of old age. The disposition to rule, to make money, to do the particular thing the man enjoyed most after he has lost the power to do it, puts a great strain on the decaying power of an old man, and often makes him show himself at the worst.

Youth has its peculiar besetments. If climbing up fool hill is difficult and dangerous, going down fool hill is even more so. The rashness and impetuosity of youth is not so difficult, oftentimes, as the conceit and hard-headedness of age, for we do not mind handling a big headed boy as he deserves, but what can be said to or done with a conceited old man, who insists that he ought to be heeded and looked up to and followed simply because he is old.

There is, with many, an utter misconception as to wisdom and age. Old people ought to know more than young people, as a rule, and some of them do, but many of them do not. They know far less than young people who have given themselves an opportunity to know. One of the disagreeable and difficult things in human progress is the assumption that gray hairs and wisdom are identical. They may be many leagues apart. When Napoleon Bonaparte began his career, he was commonly spoken of as a sort of lucky adventurer. The old generals of Europe discounted the upstart. They had long records behind them, usually records of doing little or nothing. They assumed that the commonplace military method-taught in all the schools were the best. It was not until they were whipped all over Europe, kingdoms smashed and thrones knocked about as playthings, that the old generals and crown heads of Europe understood that wisdom and age are not inseparable companions. There was no match found for the young Corsican until William Pitt, still in the twenties, formed a great European coalition against Napoleon, and, after many years, defeated him. The world's greatest work in all lines has been largely done by young men, and against the influence of old men. No man, because he is gray headed, can assume that he knows enough to govern or lead.

There is a particular mark in the lives of old men which indicates their unsuitness to lead in the world's great work. Here it is: "It did not use to be that way." The substance of that remark is put in many forms. "I never saw things that way before." "It was not that way when I was a boy." "It was not that way where I came from." The dead line lies across the path of every man. Sometimes it is at his death, perhaps, as in the case of a few illustrious men at eighty or ninety, sometimes at sixty, fifty, forty, thirty. That dead line is just where men go backward and not forward.

Let us stop to think a moment. The world is moving on toward its ultimate destiny. I feel in my soul, that it

is a glorious destiny, because God reigns and because he gave his Son to make a glorious destiny for the world. In the very nature of the case, there must be progress. Progress discards old methods for better, or else there would not be any progress. The man who believes that the world ought to live as it did thirty or forty years ago, is an incumbrance on his age and generation. He is wholly unfit to lead and cannot lead. If he could, he would lead backward. This is one of the great perils of age. Many a good man has given himself no chance to grow with the world. He stagnated twenty or thirty years ago. There is no expansion in his life or in his soul. He looks backward and his vision is ever narrower and narrower. He complains at the times and is an obstruction to his church, to his country, to his family, and he forces on those who would do him reverence the necessity to set aside his unwise counsels for things that are better.

I write these words in great love for brethren who, like myself, are not on the shady side of life, but on the sunny side, next to heaven. And I write to caution brethren who are old or getting old, against the assumption that because they are old, they know things better than other people whether they have studied or not. The presumption of wisdom is with the aged, but it is a presumption that must be justified by wisdom itself.

Not a few churches have been utterly stagnated and some of them brought to the verge of ruin by old people, who want everything just like it used to be. There was no organ in the church when they were young. The pastor was not paid a salary. The people were contented with a plain board house. They had a protracted meeting once a year, and there was none of this everlasting ding-donging about missions and education and pastoral support. And so they think it ought to be that way still, but it is not, and will not be, and ought not to be. Every church, like every person, must serve its generation according to the will of God. Things which belong to methods merely, must be adjusted to suit the times continuously as a boy's coat must be enlarged, year by year, to make room for the boy.

I want to speak against the superciliousness of age. I have seen it. I have seen old men who spoke to their juniors with an air, that said, "My young friend, you are not in it, you are very green. May be if you live forty or fifty years you might know something." And then some old men wonder that they have no influence with young people. How could they have any influence? And I press the question further: It is the function of wise, old age to be sympathetic and helpful to the young, and that arrogant spirit that assumes everything and allows nothing, makes it impossible for the old to do the young any good. Dr. Jeter, of Virginia, was one of the wisest of men. He maintained his cheerfulness to the very last, and his deep interest in the world's movements. He was keenly alive to the pleasures and the progress of the young and divided his time between writing weighty editions for his paper and playing croquet with the girls. It is not necessary to say that he was a man with ever-expanding influence and power.

What shall I say of the ugliness of envy in old men, especially in old preachers. I rather admire the peculiar mark of a venerable brother in Mississippi, when in an association with me. Calling attention to three young preachers, he said: "It does my heart good to see the young veterans coming on." A robust age such as we live in, requires much warm blood. It is largely the business of older preachers to temper the judgments of the younger, but in no case to suppress their ardor. Envy is a horrid trait of character in any one, but in the old, it is specially horrible, and most so in old preachers.

The wisdom of a thoughtful, sweet, old age, mellowed under a long continued sunshine of the gospel, is very largely to shift off the burden of life, judiciously upon younger shoulders, and with heavenly tact to direct the oncoming workers into the best ways of service.

I speak a word to old Christians, preachers and all, who are conscious that they have passed the age of active service. This is a trying thing, I must think. When one feels that his natural strength has abated, that his mind is not so alert and reliable as it has been, and that the time has come for him to give up leadership. Many a man has spoiled, to a degree, a long life of service by resistance to the course of nature. Just at this point some of the old traits of early life, under the decay of nature, have come to the front. Many a man has built up a great influence for forty years, and because he could not carry the burden of the work which he himself had created, has, in a fit of jealousy and pride and disappointment and downright self-will, turned against the work and gave the last years of his life to pulling down what he had built up in his better days. He has thus embittered his own life and those nearest him with the bitterness of disappointed old age.

I have recently passed my sixtieth milestone and I am writing this article for myself largely. To grow old gracefully is great, to mellow into old age under the influence of grace is greater still. Those who have passed active service, as all who live to extreme old age may yet be exceedingly useful by giving encouragement to the young, by illustrating in their own lives a sunshiny disposition, and by doing much of the lighter work of the kingdom of God. There are other perils of old age of which I will not speak, and I will leave the great matter of the pleasures of age almost untouched.—Baptist Standard.

## "Always."

ROBERTSON NICHOL.

"Always" is the keyword of Christianity. Other religions make concessions to human nature. They allow periods of outbreak and unrestraint. If you will keep the law 360 days in the year, you can have five days to work your own will. You will be free from one commandment if only you will obey the rest. Even in the corrupted forms of Christianity this tendency to allow some occasional relaxation may be found. No doubt it is very congenial to human nature. No doubt it helps to make the acceptance of a religion very much easier. We are not so unwilling to conform at times if times of license are given to us. But Christianity makes no exception, permits no deviation. It takes its law and its power from the presence of Christ, who is with us always, all the days, and all the hours of the days, through all the years of vivid experience, with their every grief and joy. The law was written of old on the tables of stone. Now we have the presence of the Lawgiver, and the law shines from the eyes of the Christ who never leaves us with a more awful imperative than before. Christ himself is never absent, never leaves us alone, never loses us from His sight, never gives us leave to go astray even for an instant.

This would be terrible news and no Gospel if it were not that the Presence of Christ is Power as well as law. Of ourselves we cannot keep the commandments. It is a fact that we are unable to raise ourselves more than a moment. There is a force that draws us downward. Even so it is with character. Man cannot permanently raise himself. Neither civilization nor anything included under civilization can make and keep a moral ascent. When Christ appeared art and culture had done their best, and yet the world was perishing in a debasement of animalism and lust. It wanted the power to secure its moral gains. Many things, we are told, in these days threaten the commercial future of Great Britain. Of our dangers, by far the most serious is the possible exhaustion of power. Unless some power is discovered to replace that which is being steadily exhausted, the sceptre must pass from us to others. So the great need of the church is power. Without that power it cannot go on living. The power it needs is supplied by Christ. Through the Holy Spirit, Christ gives power to those that trust Him. To as many as receive Him, He gives power to become the sons of God, even to those who believe in His name. Into our wavering hearts He seeks to pour the new wine of His Spirit, and thus to make them strong. It is an old and true saying, "What the soul is to the body that Christ is to the soul." As the body when the soul has passed from it is still, motionless, perishing, so is the soul without Christ dead in trespasses and sins, unable to recover itself and wake. When He takes full possession He re-animates and rules, and His commandments cease to be grievous, and the passions that went after forbidden things are disenchanted and frozen.

So confident of its power is Christianity that it carries its perpetual demands into every region of labor and thought. Yes, to every cave, every mountain height of every region. Thus we are to be "always abounding in the work of the Lord." Has Christianity, then, no place for rest? If there is one thing above another in this weary world that we claim and crave, it is the privilege of rest. If six days of the week we labor and do our work, then does not the seventh belong to us? If we toil for eleven months of the year, do we not need the twelfth for play? Does Christ grudge us rest? No, verily, for it was as the Rest-giver that He came. Did He not preach His rest in the days of His flesh to a company of the poorest and most enslaved, wearied with labor, worn with sorrow? Did He not mercifully say to His disciples, "Rest awhile?" Yes; but He bound together labor and rest as all the work of the Lord. When He rested Himself, He set the pattern of resting for His people. "Jesus being wearied with his journey, sat thus on the well." Sat thus. He did not say, "None can claim Me. I have been set free by God and man to please Myself for the time, and no need but My own my urge itself upon Me." No; for then we read that the Weary gave rest to the weary. The Saviour preached to the woman of Samaria, told her all things that ever she did, gave her of the water of which if any drink they shall never thirst again. It may be, and it is sometimes, just as much of the work of the Lord to rest as to labor. What is constant is our obligation to abound in the work of the Lord, to toil and to cease from toiling in His presence, by His strength, under His eye.

More than that, Christianity enters into the region of mood and feeling. It seems as if the world would never be brought under complete command. Our actions, our words we may recall; but who is to control emotion, who is to answer for the moods that come and go, independently, as it seems, of our will? It is written, "Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say rejoice." But how hard that is, hard for all, especially hard for us, for of all the emotions the emotion which our nation feels least is that of pure joy. It has almost died from us, save in the case of the very young. How are we to rejoice always, amid the absorbing and confounding sorrows of