

THE BEAUTY OF OLD AGE.

OLD age owes a portion of its dignity to the authority it has won from experience, and a still greater degree consists in its proximity to that great future which will soon resolve the eternal destinies of men. Peace of soul beams uneclipsed from the brow of those devotees of excellence, who have preserved unstained the sacred treasure of moral virginity. Especially is its radiance majestically serene, as a halo of heavenly beams around the head of old age, when adorned with the attractiveness of frugal virtue and crowned with the memorials of a beneficent life. The termination of such an earthly sojourn is a repose calm and impressive, but a repose full of sublime vigour, like a mountain relieved against the clear evening sky, and radiant with the sun's richest splendours. The smile of heaven and the sweetest dew descend on brow and bosom, with the assurance that, though the shades of dawn night are gathering round, the glories of a brighter morn will soon succeed. It is in relation to the same subject, that Wordsworth suggests:

'Rightly it is said
That man descends into the vale of years;
Yet have I thought that we might also speak,
And not presumptuously, I trust, of age,
As of a final eminence, though bare
In aspect and forbidding, yet a point
On which 'tis not impossible to sit
In awful sovereignty—a place of power—
A throne.'

An aged man, in whose soul purity and piety constitute the chief springs of action, and whose life, therefore, has been upright and useful, exercises a mild but potent magistracy upon earth. We instinctively revere him, and, without being commanded so to do, we are obedient to his exalted thoughts. In his presence animosities are subdued, passionate desires are calmed, guilt is stricken with compunction, and innocence is fortified with augmented strength. This power of venerable virtue is the more real and praiseworthy, because its control is not ostentatiously exercised. It is spontaneous in its goodness, and, like the sun, shines abroad quietly only to bless. It is a power that we approach with involuntary delight; we consult the venerated patriarch in the atmosphere of his own integrity, and feel ourselves better for honouring him; we covet his esteem, and the profoundness of our regard for his worth is the best commentary on the text, 'The beauty of old men is the grey head.'

Purity of mind and habit is essential to vigour of body, manliness of soul, the greatest force of thought, and the longest duration of life. 'A chaste soul,' said Bernard, 'is by virtue that which an angel is by nature; there is more happiness in the chastity of an angel, but there is more of courage in that of a man.' The remark of Cicero on this subject is striking, if we consider the age and country in which it was made. 'This grand law,' says he, 'differs but a little from the religious institutions of Numa. It requires that one should approach the gods with a pure heart, the central sanctuary of a chaste body; but we should understand that, if the body is required to be chaste, the soul is vastly superior to

the corporeal frame, and therefore has still greater need to be pure: the stains of the body will of themselves disappear in a few days, or may be washed off by a little water; but neither time nor the greatest rivers can remove stains from the soul.'

It is an interesting fact, that Providence allows only such creatures as are pure long to remain among mankind as the objects of their admiration. Corrupt genius, however potent, has never created a lasting work of art that is lascivious in character. The hand of violence or contempt, despite the depraved instincts of the heart, soon consigns such works to oblivion. Paris, Florence, Rome, have no productions of art essentially beautiful, grand, or sublime, that are of a nature to create on the cheek of a vestal the slightest blush. Many have attempted lewd subjects, but, by the conservative law of God's holy government, such nuisances are speedily driven into darkness and consigned to the worm; while those masterpieces which illustrate and edify virtue, like truth, live on for ever. The virgin mothers and cherubic youth of Murillo and Raphael are heavenly beings on canvass, and will perish only when matter itself must die, and even then the recollection of them will live in the memories of the sanctified as an element of immortal bliss. The group of Laocoon, which sends a thrill of emotion through one's soul years after it was first seen; Niobe, and her despairing children; Brutus, with his impressive mien; the Gladiator, sinking in his own heart's gore; Apollo, beaming with supernatural glory; and the exquisite work of Cleomenes, 'that bending statue that delights the world,' are all imperishable, not because they are cut in marble, but because the ideas they embody are divinely pure.

But if sculptured excellence is worthy of admiration, how much more so is living worth. A virtuous and enlightened old man is the noblest object to be contemplated on earth. Says Solomon, 'Children's children are the crown of old men; and the glory of children are their fathers.' Priam, venerable in aspect as Mount Ida, like the bleached oaks of Gargara, hoary headed, and seated on his throne in the midst of an august court and his numerous household; and Plato, in the grove, or on the point of that cape, his favourite seat, where dashed the billows of the sea, bending his broad, venerable brow to teach throngs of youth the nature of God and eternal bliss, were among the ancient specimens of beautiful old age which we should do well to emulate.

When the affections have early been divorced from earth, and the wings of the mind have been accustomed through succeeding years to stretch further and further above the rank vapours of vice, they are prepared, when the ties of earth are sundered, to soar in triumph to the infinite expanse of immortal joys. *As in the ashes lives the wonted fire*, so, in the persons of the virtuous, the bright lamp which spiritual purity has kindled never grows dim. Mammon has not prostituted it; Bacchus has not obscured it; and though its light expires to our limited vision, it is not extinguished: angels have raised it to a higher sphere, where it forever shines in unclouded day. —Hogg's Instructor.