

*The Progress of Old Age in New Studies*

OF the pleasures derivable from the cultivation of the arts, sciences, and literature, time will not abate the growing passion; for old men still cherish an affection and feel a youthful enthusiasm in those pursuits, when all others have ceased to interest. Dr. Reid, to his last day, retained a most active curiosity in his various studies, and particularly in the revolutions of modern chemistry. In advanced life we may resume our former studies with a new pleasure, and in old age we may enjoy them with the same relish with which more youthful students commence. Professor Dugald Stewart tells us that Adam Smith observed to him, that “of all the amusements of old age, the most grateful and soothing as a renewal of acquaintance with the favourite studies and favourite authors of youth—a remark, which, in his own case, seemed to be more particularly exemplified while he was re-perusing, with the enthusiasm of a student, the tragic poets of ancient Greece. I have heard him repeat the observation more than once while Sophocles and Euripides lay open on his table.”

Socrates learnt to play on musical instruments in his old age; Cato, at eighty, thought proper to learn Greek; and Plutarch, almost as late in his life, Latin.

Theophrastus began his admirable work on the Characters of Men at the extreme age of ninety. He only terminated his literary labours by his death.

Ronsard, one of the fathers of French poetry, applied himself late to study. His acute genius, and ardent application, rivalled those poetic models which he admired; and Boccaccio was thirty-five years of age when he commenced his studies in polite literature.

The great Arnauld retained the vigour of his genius, and the command of his pen, to his last day; and at the age of eighty-two was still the great Arnauld.

Sir Henry Spelman neglected the sciences in his youth, but cultivated them at fifty years of age, and produced good fruit. His early years were chiefly passed in farming, which greatly diverted him from his studies; but a remarkable disappointment respecting a contested estate disgusted him with these rustic occupations; resolved to attach himself to regular studies, and literary society, he sold his farms, and became the most learned antiquary and lawyer.

Colbert, the famous French minister, almost at sixty, returned to his Latin and law studies.

Tellier, the chancellor of France, learned logic, merely

for an amusement, to dispute with his grandchildren.

Dr. Johnson applied himself to the Dutch language but a few years before his death. The Marquis de Saint Aulaire, at the age of seventy, began to court the Muses, and they crowned him with their freshest flowers. The verses of this French Anacreon are full of fire, delicacy, and sweetness.

Chaucer's Canterbury Tales were the composition of his latest years: they were begun in his fifty-fourth year, and finished in his sixty-first.

Ludovico Monaldesco, at the extraordinary age of 115, wrote the memoirs of his times. A singular exertion, noticed by Voltaire, who himself is one of the most remarkable instances of the progress of age in new studies.

The most delightful of autobiographies for artists is that of Benvenuto Cellini; a work of great originality, which was not begun till "the clock of his age had struck fifty-eight."

Koornhert began at forty to learn the Latin and Greek languages, of which he became a master; several students, who afterwards distinguished themselves, have commenced as late in life their literary pursuits. Ogilby, the translator of Homer and Virgil, knew lit-

tle of Latin or Greek till he was past fifty; and Franklin's philosophical pursuits began when he had nearly reached his fiftieth year.

Accorso, a great lawyer, being asked why he began the study of the law so late, answered, that indeed he began it late, but should therefore master it the sooner.

Dryden's complete works form the largest body of poetry from the pen of one writer in the English language; yet he gave no public testimony of poetic abilities till his twenty-seventh year. In his sixty-eighth year he proposed to translate the whole Iliad; and his most pleasing productions were written in his old age.

Michael Angelo preserved his creative genius even in extreme old age: there is a device said to be invented by him, of an old man represented in a *go-cart* with an hour-glass upon it; the inscription *Ancorca imparo!*—YET I AM LEARNING!

We have a literary curiosity in a favourite treatise with Erasmus and men of letters of that period, *De Ratione Studii*, by Joachim Sterck, otherwise Fortius de Rhingelberg. The enthusiasm of the writer often carries him to the verge of ridicule; but something must be granted to his peculiar situation and feelings; for

Baillet tells us that this method of studying had been formed entirely from his own practical knowledge and hard experience: at a late period of life he commenced his studies, and at length he imagined that he had discovered a more perpendicular mode of ascending the hill of science than by its usual circuitous windings. His work Mr. Knox compares to the sounding of a trumpet.

Menage, in his *Anti-Baillet*, has a very curious apology for writing verses in his old age, by showing how many poets amused themselves notwithstanding their grey hairs, and wrote sonnets or epigrams at ninety.

La Casa, in one of his letters, humorously said, *In credo ch'io farò Sonnetto venti cinque anni, o trenta, poi che io sarò morto*. I think I may make sonnets twenty-five, or perhaps thirty years, after I shall be dead! Petau tells us that he wrote verses to solace the evils of old age—

—————Petavius æger

Cantabat veteris quærens solatia morbi.

Malherbe declares the honours of genius were his, yet young—

Je les posseday jeune, et les possède encore  
A la fin de mes jours!

Maynard moralises on this subject,

En cheveux blancs il me faut donc aller  
Comme un enfant tons les jours à l'école;  
Que je suis fou d'apprendre a bien parler  
Lorsque la mort vient m'oter la parole.