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CICERO ON OLD AGE
'Oh thou all eloquent, whose mighty mind
Streams from the depths of ages on mankind,
Streams like the day—who angel-like has shed
Thy full effulgence on the hoary head
Speaking in Cato's venerable voice,
"Look up and faint not—faint not but rejoice!"

S. Rogers on Human Life.
INTRODUCTION

CICERO, in spite of all his detractors, must ever remain one of the most famous and outstanding of all the great men who adorned the long history of the Roman State. Her greatest orator in troubled and eventful days—one, indeed, of the great orators of the world—the statesman who saved his country from the very real dangers of the conspiracy of Catiline—the polished writer whose numerous works tell of his literary industry, and who through them, in the words of Dr. Merivale, 'has made converts to the belief in virtue, and has disciples in the wisdom of love'—the man who in his letters has given to us his inmost thoughts on men and on events, letters which though intended only for the eyes of those to whom they were addressed, reveal to the world a cultivated, attractive, and affectionate character—such an one must always be sure in an unusual degree of the love and admiration of posterity. His treatises, it is said, are not original. He made for them no such claim. They are, he said, but translations. But, such as they are, they have charmed the world by their pure and matchless
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style, and of them Mr. Strachan-Davidson declares that 'if we desired to decide what ancient writings have most directly influenced the modern world, the award must probably go in favour of Plutarch's lives and the philosophical works of Cicero.' Plutarch tells a story how in later days Augustus Cæsar found one of his grandsons with a work of Cicero in his hands. The lad was frightened, and hid the book under his gown; but Cæsar took it from him, and read the most part of it standing: then he gave it back to him, and said, 'This was a great orator, my boy, a great orator and one who loved his country well.' This is Cicero's true epitaph—the one he would most have liked to have inscribed upon his tomb. Mommsen has endeavoured, indeed, to paint him as a mere trimmer, anxious only to be on the safe side. Mr. Froude denounces the way in which at one time he heaped his flatteries on Cæsar, and at another rejoiced over his assassination. Neither of these estimates is quite fair. Cicero lived in difficult and dangerous days, when various and conflicting elements were surging round him, and to choose what was best was difficult; but there is no doubt he sincerely wished to maintain the greatness of the Republic, whose triumphs he had shared, and that old order of things to which he was so devotedly attached. But to
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which of the various competitors for power would it be safe to entrust the task? on whom could he rely? Cæsar—Antony—Pompey—Octavius—he looked to each in turn: disappointment dogged his steps. Each in turn was found to be seeking only for absolute power, and caring nothing for the prosperity and honour of the State. After the death of Cæsar, when he found that, though the tyrant was gone, the tyranny remained, he still maintained the struggle, and the last year of his life was illumined by the splendid series of his orations against Antony—which, in allusion to those of Demosthenes against Philip, he termed 'the Philippics.' He now hoped for salvation to the State from Octavius; but once more he misjudged his man, and the staff on which he trusted proved a bruised reed and pierced his hand. Antony and Octavius united for the moment, and one of the terms of union was the proscription and death of Cicero. He died a not ignoble death at the hands of hired assassins. Perhaps he had no wish to live to see the failure of his schemes. 'Brutus,' he says in a letter to Atticus, 'is thinking of going into exile: I have in my mind's eye a readier haven for a man of my age: but death, exile, or anything is better than submission.' He might have escaped had he chosen; but preferred as he said
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to die in the country which he had often saved. The last two years of his life indeed were full of trouble, not only on public, but private grounds as well. The divorce from his wife Terentia—the death of his darling daughter Tullia—the miserable career of his son—the unfortunate issue of his second marriage—all these troubles fell upon him in a single year. What wonder that he turned to divine philosophy for comfort in the storm? Immediately after the fatal ides of March, 44 B.C., when Cæsar fell, he retreated to his villas in the country, and devoted himself, full of doubt and disenchantment as he was on public matters, to the writing of some of his most famous works—the De Naturâ Deorum, the De Divinatione, the De Fato, the De Officiis. To these he added his treatise on Old Age, and that on Friendship. Almost despairing for the moment of the State, he seeks to do what little good he can by laying down rules of conduct which may be followed by those who are to succeed him in later and he hopes happier days. 'What greater or better service,' he says in one of his treatises written at this time, 'can we render to the State, than to teach and instruct the young, and especially in these days when youth has fallen into such decay, as to call for all our efforts to restrain and control it?' His dialogue on Old Age has always been considered
one of his most charming and interesting works. On old age itself every man probably holds opinions of his own, formed according to his experience and his temperament. We may almost say, 'Quot senes, tot sententiae.' There are those no doubt who, obliged to withdraw by lessening strength from the activities they once delighted in, and having no resources in reserve to take their place, feel life a bore. There are others who are saddened because a life of pleasure is no longer possible; they are soured and discontented because they cherish in advancing years the ideas that were natural to their prime. Others become morose and grumbling because the ideals of their youth have not been realised, and the hope of fruition has now passed beyond recall. Others have attained the honours which they thought should have been their own. The knowledge fills them with disgust: they linger on the stage disappointed and annoyed, in the expressive phrase of Plautus, mere 'Acheruntici,' 'with one leg in the grave.' Cicero's reply to all these grumblers is, at any rate, a sane and healthy one. A happy old age, he lays down, follows a well-spent youth. We must learn, he says, to adapt ourselves to the surroundings in which we find ourselves, and fortunate shall we be if we have trained our minds to pursuits and occupations in which
we can still, in spite of lessened strength, indulge. The mind need not of necessity share the infirmities of the body. Cicero himself had now crossed the border which according to the Roman ideas ushered in old age. He was sixty-three. Yet he shows no signs of it. His literary activity, his interest in affairs, his brightness and vivacity are as great as ever. For the moment his plans of reformation in the State had broken down—troubles in his own family crowd upon him—but not for a moment does he allow his mental activity to unbend. Like Milton in his blindness:

‘Though fallen on evil days,
On evil days though fallen, and evil tongues,
In darkness and with dangers compassed round
And solitude,’

he does not abandon himself to despair. He finds like him his refuge in divine philosophy, and with him he cries:

‘So much the rather, thou celestial light,
Shine inward, and the mind through all her powers
Irradiate.’

This is indeed the true philosophy of life. When Sir Walter Scott was dying, he thus addressed his son-in-law who was standing by his bed: ‘Be a good man, for nothing else can bring you any comfort when you come to lie here: be virtuous, be religious, be good.’
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This is to live the well-spent life, which, according to Cicero, is the prelude of a contented old age. In another place, Sir Walter emphasises the same note. 'Whatever,' he says, 'may be alleged to the contrary, to each duty performed there is assigned a degree of mental peace and high consciousness of honourable exertion corresponding to the difficulty of the task accomplished. That rest of body which succeeds to hard and industrious toil is not to be compared to the repose which the spirit enjoys under similar circumstances.' These were the principles on which he had himself acted in his life, and so when in later years disaster came upon him—disaster that would have crushed another man—he was able, in spite of it, to continue his literary work, and write the romances that have charmed the world. And not unlike Sir Walter’s was Cicero’s experience of life. He had touched on the one side and the other the farthest extremes of fate. The first of orators, he is called, without any advantages of birth or position, to the highest office in the State at the early age of forty-two. There he saves his country in its hour of greatest danger, is saluted by an admiring Senate as the Father of his country, and receives the honour of a public thanksgiving never before accorded to a civilian. A few years pass, and he is condemned for the very actions for which he had been
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praised; banished, and forbidden to come within four hundred miles of the Rome he loved, his house on the Palatine thrown down, his favourite villas wrecked, destroyed, and trampled under foot. Like Dante he is an exile from all he most desired and loved. A year elapses and he is recalled. The desolate wanderer is welcomed back by a still grateful country. From Brundisium, where he landed, to the Porta Capena where he entered Rome, his journey is a continued ovation. Deputations crowd upon him from every town and village. The Senate comes forth along the famous Appian road to receive him, the whole population deserts the city and chokes the roads and the adjoining fields. That one day, he declares, was the equivalent of immortality. A few more years of public service at home and abroad follow—and then once more Cicero, growing old at the age of sixty-three, sees danger to the State. Ambitious and turbulent men are endeavouring to subvert their country's liberties. Cæsar's death has not preserved them. And so once more he determines to go back into private life. He turns with avidity to his literary pursuits, and writes, among others, his treatise on old age, which I have ventured to produce in a new form. Once again at the end of six months the clouds, as he thinks, lift, and he comes back in the hope that he may still be
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able to save his country by his counsels and advice. 'A crowded hour of glorious life' re-
 mains, in which he writes, or delivers, his philippics against Antony; but once more he fails, and falls by the assassin's hand. There was dignity in his end, and though his political aspirations came to nought, he remains, in the words of Augustus, 'one who loved his country well.' 'He was,' says Livy, 'a great and memor-
 able man, and it would need a Cicero to pronounce his eulogium.' Catullus, the greatest lyrical poet of Rome, does homage to Cicero's eloquence:

'Tully, of all most eloquent,  
From Romulus who claim descent,  
That are to-day or in the past have been  
Or in the future ages may be seen:  
Great thanks to thee Catullus gives,  
Worst poet in the world that lives:  
Worst poet he of all who play the part  
As thou by far the best of pleaders art.'

Such was the verdict of two of his literary contemporaries—a verdict endorsed by the best representatives of literature in every succeeding age.
CICERO ON OLD AGE

Ἀ H, Titus, if in ought I may avail
To help and soothe the care which vexes you
And tears your heart, what shall be my reward?¹
For so I may address you in the words
Which he, 'the man, whose worldly wealth was small,
But yet was great in heart,' did one day use
To old Flaminius, though I know full well
You are not, like Flaminius, still assailed
By cares, both day and night. I recognise

¹ These lines, which are put into the mouth of a peasant who offers to act as a guide to the Roman army in its Macedonian campaign, are from the Annals of Ennius, one of the earliest poets of Rome (239–170 B.C.). The Annals contained the national story from mythical ages to his own. Lucretius speaks of him (i. 117):

'As our fam'd Ennius sings, upon whose brow
The first and freshest crowns of laurel grow
That ever learned Italy could show.'

He was the inventor of the Latin hexameter. The Titus he addressed was Titus Quinctius Flaminius, the conqueror of Philip of Macedon. Cicero applies them to his friend Titus Pomponius Atticus, to whom the treatise is dedicated. It was written probably in 44 B.C., when Cicero was sixty-three—in the troubled period that followed the death of Cæsar. Cicero had much need of its consolations. He says, in a letter to Atticus: 'I must read my treatise over and over again; it is dedicated to you. Old age is spoiling my temper. Everything puts me in a rage. For me life is over.'
CICERO ON OLD AGE

Your temperate and well-ordered mind, and know
From Athens you did not derive your name
Alone, but with it all its culture and good sense.
And yet sometimes I fancy you have felt
The self-same feelings, which do trouble me,
Which are more serious, and with which I'll deal
Some later day. 2

Enough that now I speak
A word upon old age, the heavy load,
Which we already, or will shortly feel,
From which I gladly would relieve us both.
And yet I know how wisely, prudently,
This you will bear, as you do all things else.
Still, when I choose to speak about old age
I think of you, and feel how you deserve
What help I have to be of use to both.
So pleasant has this treatise been to write,
That it has wiped away and put aside
The troubles of old age, and made them seem
Easy and pleasant. Ah, we never can
Be thankful to philosophy enough,
Which thus enables us to spend our days,
Howe'er prolonged, without monotony.
Of other things I have already spoke
And will again: this treatise, now I send,

2 These allude to the State troubles which fell so heavily on
Cicero in his later years. Thus he writes to one of his friends:
‘You are far away; if you were here to see the condition of
affairs, you could not refrain from tears. I could not bear it all
if it were not that I take refuge in the haven of philosophy, and
have our dear Atticus as the companion of my studies.’ Atticus
was an Epicurean, whose main object was to lead a calm, un-
troubled life—in which he seems to have succeeded with a good
deal of adroitness. After a long residence in Athens he added to
his name the title of Atticus.
CICERO ON OLD AGE

Deals with old age. I have not put the words into the mouth, as some I see have done, of some one famed in fable or in myth (Aristo used Tithonus, as you know: such tales count little), but have chosen one, Old Cato, whose authority will give weight to my words: with him I will present Lælius, and Scipio, who in wonder ask how he so easily can bear old age: he will reply: and if it seems that he more learning shows than in his books is found, remember how that in his latest years he studied still the learning of the Greeks. But why say more?—old Cato will himself.

3 Aristo of Ceos, a philosopher, 225 B.C. Cicero calls him 'Concinus et elegans Aristo.' Tithonus, whom Aristo introduced in his treatise on Old Age, was the brother of Priam. By the prayers of the goddess Aurora, he obtained the gift of immortality, but she forgot to ask eternal youth as well, and he became a decrepit, shrunk old man. Tennyson tells the story:

'Immortal age beside immortal youth.
... Ah! let me go: take back thy gift:
Why should a man desire in any way
To vary from the kindly race of men,
Or pass beyond the goal of ordinance,
Where all should pause, as is most meet for all.'

4 M. Porcius Cato was a soldier, an orator, a farmer, and an author, 234–149 B.C. He distinguished himself in the second Punic War. He wrote a treatise on agriculture, and in his later days was an exponent of the good old Roman virtue and severity. Livy has a striking panegyric of him: 'In parsimonia, in patientia laboris, periculi, prope ferrei corporis animique, quem non senectus quidem, quæ solvit omnia, fregerit: qui sextum et octagesimum annum agens causam dixerit, ipse pro se oraverit scripsitque: nonagesimo anno S. Galbam ad populi adduxerit judicium' (xxxix. 40). He is the principal speaker in the dialogue, Scipio and Lælius merely appearing to introduce the subject.
CICERO ON OLD AGE

Explain our feeling fully on old age.

Scipio. We oft have wondered, Laelius and I,
At all your wisdom, Catō, and your power,
And most of all that you have never felt
Old age as tedious as others do,
A burden, they declare, more hard to bear
Than Etna's self would be, if laid on them.5

Cato. Your wonder is misplaced, dear friends: of course
To those who've no resources in themselves
For a good and happy life, why, every age
Is hard to bear: but those who have within
All that is needful for a life well-spent,
Can never find misfortune in the lot
That nature's laws impose. And one such lot
Is that old age must come to each and all,
Old age so fondly hoped for, when it comes,
So oft found to be irksome. Such, alas!
Is Folly's want of reason and resolve.
They say that it has come with quicker step
Than they expected: pray, who was it then
Forced them to this illusion? Did old age
Come quicker upon youth, than youth itself
On childhood? Had it seemed a lighter load
If they had reached not to their eightieth year
But e'en to ten times that? For sure past years
Howe'er prolonged could ne'er endow with charm
A stupid old age. So if you admire
My wisdom, and I wish that it was worth

5 Cf. Euripides, *Hercules Furens*, 637:

‘Glad was my youth, and light as air;
But age, a burden on my head,
Heavier than all the rocks of Etna lies.’

4
CIÇERO ON OLD AGE

Your wonder and my name,⁶ sure it consists
In taking nature's laws to be our guide,
Our guide divine, and yielding to their will;
If she has wisely shaped our earlier years,
It is not likely she has overlooked
The latest act, as though it were a play,
Writ by some careless poet. Needs must be
A final stage, just as we see in trees;
The fruits and berries come, and with them too
A shrivelling and a withering of strength,
Which we, if wise, must bear contentedly.
To fight with nature, what, I trow, is that,⁷
But like the giants to make war on gods?

Inicius. Most grateful shall we be, my friend and I,
(I sure may speak for him) if, as we hope
And wish at any rate to reach old age,
You would instruct us, Cato, ere we do,
What methods we should take, to enable us
How best to bear the weight of growing years.

Cato. I'll gladly do so, if it be your wish.

Inicius. It is indeed, that we may hear from you
As having passed a long and toilsome road,
That we too have to travel, what it's like.

Cato. I'll do my best, oft has it been my lot
To hear such grumblers, men of my own years
Like Livius Salinator and Albinus
(Birds of a feather, so the proverb goes),
Men of position, who have oft deplored,

⁶ Cato was called Sapiens, The Wise.
⁷ Cf. Hor. Odes, iii. 4, 42:
‘One there lives we know
Who from the skies with lightnings riven
The Titans and their host laid low.’

Gladstone's Translation.
How much they missed the pleasures that had given
A zest to life: how they no more possessed
That favour which was once so freely theirs.
In this, I think, that they had missed the point.
If, as they say, old age must bear the blame,
Then I and all who are advanced in years
Must feel the same: yet have I many known
Who bore it uncomplaining: who declared
That gladly they were freed from passion's chains,
And yet were not looked down on by their friends.
'Tis not to years that such complaints are due;
'Tis character's at fault. For temperate men,
Men who are not cross-grained and hard to live with,
Find age no burden: 'tis the rude and churlish
No time of life can ever satisfy.

*Laelius.* Cato, 'tis as you say: yet some may think
It was your wealth, position, dignity,
These things, which are not in the lot of all,
That made old age more pleasant to yourself.

*Cato.* Something there is in that: not surely all.
Themistocles, 'tis told, disputed once
With one that from Seriphos came, who said
That by his country's greatness, not his own,
He had attained to fame; and he replied,
'If I'd been of Seriphos, it is true,
I had not been distinguished, nor would you
Had you been born at Athens.' Something like

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8 The story is told in Plato, *Rep.* i. 239; and also by Herodotus, *viii.* 125.
CICERO ON OLD AGE

Might well be said of age. In poverty, 
Even the wise must find it burdensome: 
While wealth can’t make it easy to a fool. 
But, after all is said, the best defence 
Against old age must be the exercise 
Of Virtue’s qualities, which, practised still 
From early years, bring forth such wondrous fruit, 
After a long and busy life; for first 
They’re always there, and never fail to come 
To your latest breath, no small thing in itself; 
And then besides what constant pleasure springs 
From inward knowledge of a life well spent, 
And the sweet memory of good deeds done.

You’ve heard, of course, of Quintus Fabius,\textsuperscript{9} 
The man who won Tarentum back for Rome; 
When young, though he was old, I loved him still 
As he had been my equal: in that man 
There was a store of courteous dignity: 
Age had not changed his character: although, 
When first I knew him, then no longer young 
But well advanced in years; the Consulship 
Fell to him the year after I was born. 
When for the fourth time he had gained that prize, 
I, as a youth, served under him, when he 
To Capua went, and later at Tarentum. 
Then I myself was Quæstor, at which time

\textsuperscript{9} Quintus Fabius Maximus, also called Cunctator, from the policy of ‘masterly inactivity’—the Joffre policy—by which he defeated the designs of Hannibal. He was five times Consul between 233 and 209 B.C.
He took a leading part in legislation;
And advocated Cincius' law on bribes.
Aye, and when old, with all the dash of youth
He bore him in the wars, and Hannibal,
Who thought with his young years to thrust
him down,
By cautious delays he quite subdued,
As our good Ennius so well has said:
‘One man by caution has restored the State
And made it in his time for ever great;
No idle rumours shake his constant mind;
The State is first: to all attacks he's blind;
And so it is hereafter more and more
His fame shall flourish with an ampler store.’
Ah, yes, what vigilance, what skill he showed
There at Tarentum; 'twas when I was there
That Salinator, who had lost the town,
Said to him, 'Twas through me your chances came,
And he replied, 'Most true, had you not lost
The town, I never had retaken it.'
As great he was in statesmanship as war.
When Consul for the second time he dared
To oppose his colleague, who had weakly thought,
On the proposal of Flaminius,
Against the Senate's will, to parcel out
Land captured in the wars; and then again
As Augur had the courage to declare
That what was for the State's supremest good,

10 These lines might well be applied to the late Lord Kitchener —in all the panegyrics of him, the main point was that he ever put duty to his country first.
CICERO ON OLD AGE

That that the auguries approved, that what
Was prejudicial to it, they condemned.
Much that was great I recognised in him,
But nought that I more wondered at, than how
He bore his son's decease, a man of mark,
Who had already filled the Consul's chair.
His funeral speech we know, which when we read
Where's the philosopher we don't contemn?
'Twas not alone in public he was great
Before the world's eyes, but greater still
In his own home. What fine discourse he held,
What maxims, what a knowledge of the law!
And for a Roman quite a scholar too.
His memory most retentive, on the wars
At home or else abroad. His whole discourse
I prized so highly, that I seemed to know
By prescience, what did in fact occur.
When he was taken, there was no one left
From whom to learn. Why say so much of him?
That you may see that 'tis impossible
Truly to say that such a man's old age
Was e'er unhappy. Yet we cannot all
Be Scipios or Fabii, and have
The taking of great cities, fights on land
Or sea, great victories ourselves have won,
And triumphs still recorded to our fame.
There is a placid and serene old age,
Following a quiet, pure, and cultured life.
And such was Plato's, in his eightieth year
Dying with pen in hand; and such, too, was

Some other cases of a happy old age.

Plato was born at Athens 429 B.C., and died 348 B.C. Cicero elsewhere calls him 'Deus philosophorum.'
CICERO ON OLD AGE

Isocrates', who tells us that he wrote His Panegyric e'en at ninety-four And lived five years beyond: whose master was Gorgias of Leontini, who preserved His freshness far beyond his hundred years, And never ceased to work. When he was asked Why he was willing to remain so long, 'I have no fault,' he said, 'to bring against Old age.' A famous saying, worthy too Of one who was a scholar. Ah, it is Their own mistakes fools urge against old age. Not so did Ennius, whom I've named before: 'As a brave horse the race that's often won Rests in his stall, and thinks of labours done.' To this he thus compares his own old age, One which you well remember. For he died But nineteen years ago, when I myself Was sixty-six, still able, with strong voice And healthy lungs, to take an arduous part In making laws; while he at seventy years (Such was his span of life) had still to bear Two of our greatest evils, as some think, Old age and poverty; and bore them so As still to seem content, and almost pleased.

Four reasons are there, when I reckon up, Why age should be unhappy: it withdraws Us from our work; weakens the body's strength;

\[\text{12 Isocrates, one of the great Attic orators, born 436 B.C. After the defeat of Chaeronea, he took his life at the age of 98. His Panegyric is called }\text{Pan-Athenaeus} \text{ because it was read at the Panathenaea.}\]

\[\text{13 Gorgias, born 480 B.C., was a teacher of rhetoric and a philosopher. He is said to have lived beyond the hundred years. One of Plato's celebrated dialogues bears his name.}\]
CICERO ON OLD AGE

Robs us of pleasures; and cannot be far
From death itself. Now these let us review,
And see what justice may attach to each.
Withdraws us from our work? what work, I pray?
From that which well accords with youth and strength?
Is there no work which age can still pursue?
In which, although the body may be weak,
The mind can take its part? Was nought achieved
By Maximus? by Paulus,\textsuperscript{14} he who was
Your father, Scipio? Or others take:
Fabricii, Curii, Coruncanii,
Did they do nothing to defend the State
By counsel and advice? Old Claudius\textsuperscript{16}
Was blind as well as aged, and yet 'twas he
Who, when the Senate would have made a peace
With Pyrrhus, and a treaty with the foe,
Was bold to say, in Ennius' famous lines:
'Where are the minds that used to stand serene,
Where is the bravery that once has been?'
And so with burning eloquence the lines
Run on: you know them: and you have beside
The speech of Appius: well, we know that he,
What time that war was waged, was old in years;
Twice he had filled the Consulship, and been

\textsuperscript{14} L. Æmilius Paulus, surnamed also Macedonicus, was the father of the Scipio of the dialogue. He was adopted by P. Scipio, son of the Scipio who defeated Hannibal at Zama.

\textsuperscript{16} Appius Claudius Cæcus. He was Censor in 312 B.C., and began the construction of the famous Appian road which was called after him. He also built the Appian aqueduct.
CICERO ON OLD AGE

A Censor too, yet such the story told,
They make no point, then, who affirm that age
Can take no part in our affairs: it is
As if one said, the helmsman in a ship
Was doing nothing, since 'tis others climb
The masts, rush through the gangways, man
the pumps,
While he with helm in hand sits in the stern.
The tasks of youth he leaves, but yet performs
Far better, more important ones himself.
Not to the swift or strong the battle is
Of life, but by wise counsel, character,
Deliberation, and of these old age
Is not deprived, but has a larger store.
Unless, indeed, you think that I who've been
In many kinds of war, first in the ranks,
And then as tribune, legate, consul too,
Am 'idle now, because I am at home.
I teach the Senate when to fight, and how;
Carthage, I know, has long been plotting ill,
And in good time I point it out: on that
My fears remain, until she is destroyed; 16
That glory, Scipio, may the gods on high
Reserve for you, that you may so complete
Your grandsire's task; 17 'tis two and thirty years

16 The famous 'Delenda est Carthago' was a saying of Cato's,
due to his foresight. Having been sent on a mission to Carthage,
he observed the menace of its growing power. He died 129 B.C.,
at the age of eighty-five.

17 P. Cornelius Scipio Africanus Major, one of the greatest
men of Rome, and distinguished in the war against Carthage.
The Scipio of the treatise was P. Cornelius Scipio Africanus, son
to L. Aemilius Paulus, and adopted by the son of the conqueror
of Hannibal, who, as Cicero names further on, had weak health,
which prevented him taking his part in public affairs.
CICERO ON OLD AGE

Since he did die, and yet all years to come
Will keep his memory green. He died the year
That I was Censor, and had been returned
Consul to serve with me a second time.
Now think you had he lived to his hundredth
year,
Had he repented him of being so old?
Sure not for him would then have been to share
In wars, excursions, and alarums, fights
With spears, or at close quarters with the sword;
His weapons, counsel, reason, and debate.
If these were not among our elder men,
Our ancestors I think had never called
Our chief assembly by the name of Senate,\(^{18}\)
Which means the place where old men meet:
and so
In Lacedæmon those who rule the State
Are termed 'the Seniors.'\(^ {19}\) If again you read
Or hear the history of States, you'll find
The greatest of them have been overturned
By rash young men, and by the old restored
And brought to life. As Nævius asks,
'Who was it brought this ruin on the State?'
And they reply, with other causes, this:
'New orators appeared to lead the way,
Too young, too foolish they to be our stay,'
For rashness is the mark of youth, the old
(\textit{Take prudence and due caution for their guide}).
But memory goes, you say. No doubt, unless
You practise it, or if you're somewhat dull.
Themistocles knew all the citizens

\(^{18}\) Senatus, the assembly of 'Senes.'
\(^{19}\) γερωνίς that of the γερωνίς—'the old'—at Sparta.
CICERO ON OLD AGE

By name: do you suppose in his old age
When Aristides came, he used to say
Lysimachus? Why I not only know
The men to-day, but who their fathers were,
And grandfathers as well. Nor do I fear
As the saying goes to lose my memory
By still perusing tombstones: nay, I find
From them I learn to know the dead and gone.
I've never heard of any old man yet,
Who knew not where he'd put away his purse,
Their memory's good for all that interests them:
When they must answer to their bail, their debts,
The money due to them. And what of lawyers,
Pontiffs, and augurs, and philosophers?
What memories they have in quite old age!
Oh, yes, the old retain their wits quite well,
If but they exercise and practise them.
And that not only in the case of men
Of high distinction and repute, but those
Who lead a quiet private life apart.
We know that Sophocles in quite old age
Went on composing plays: and when his sons,
Thinking that from his close pursuit of art
His own affairs had suffered, made him come
Before the court, and asked that as our law
Removes from the control of his affairs
A father who is squandering his means,
So he, as weak in intellect, should be
Likewise prohibited. His answer was

20 Sophocles, the great tragic poet, was born 495 B.C. The 
Ædipus at Colonus was his last work, written, it is said, in his
ninetieth year. It is to this that allusion is made.
To lay the piece, which then he had in hand, Before the judge, recite it, and then ask, 'Is that a weak man's work?' He won his case. Take Homer, Hesiod, and Simonides, Isocrates, or Gorgias, whom I named, The great philosophers, Pythagoras, Plato, Democritus, Zenocrates, Or Zeno or Cleanthes; later still, Diogenes, whom you have seen at Rome: Tell me, did age in any one of these Compel him to be silent? is it not A fact that is well known to all of us, Their active studies ended with their lives? But to pass by these studies of the Gods, I can enumerate friends among my own And neighbours from the Sabine land close by, Just Roman country folk, in whose absence None of the greater field works are performed, As sowing, reaping, garnering of the fruit. In these things this need not surprise at all: For no one is so old, as not to think That he may live a year. But they bestow Their toil on what they know can't profit them. 'He plants his trees in order that they may Afford us shelter, in some distant day,' As Statius says. Nor would a farmer e'er

21 These all, with the exception of Diogenes, were philosophers of the great age of Greece. Diogenes here is Diogenes the Stoic, to be distinguished from the Cynic of the same name.

22 Caecilius Statius was a Roman comic poet, who died 168 B.C., of an earlier date than Terence. He must be distinguished from the later Pomponius Statius. Horace thought highly of him: 'Vincere Caecilius gravitate Terentius arte.' Like Terence, he was a slave, and born at Milan.
CICERO ON OLD AGE

To one who asked for whom he plants his trees
Decline to answer, 'For the Gods above,
Who willed that those who went before should give
Me all I have, that I again may hand
Them safely on to my posterity.'

Far better that, than what Cæcilius sings:
'Ah, age, if you bring nought beside
This is enough for me,
That you bring with you many things
One never wished to see.'

And much too that is pleasant: and beside
In youth we meet with much that we dislike.
Worse still is this the same Cæcilius sings:
'This is the great misfortune of the old,
To feel that others' love to them grows cold.'
Nay, rather love is greater than it was,
For just as old men take delight to see
Young men of parts around them, and it makes
Their age more pleasant, when they see they're loved
And honoured by the young: the young themselves
Delight to hear the precepts of the old,
And so are led to follow Virtue's paths.
Nor do I think that I less pleasant am
To you, than you to me. And so you see
Old age not only is not given to ease
And idleness, but rather full of work,
Still doing, planning something new and fresh
On the same lines that it has done before.
Nay, do not some their learning still increase?
You know old Solon's boast, that every day
CICERO ON OLD AGE

When growing old, he learned something fresh; Or I myself, who learned Greek when old, And made such great advancement in its lore While seeking to assuage my daily thirst, That I then noted down the very things Which I now use to adorn my treatises. And when I heard what Socrates had done Upon the lyre (the ancients learned the lyre), I wished to learn it too, but still pursued My taste for letters.

Nor did I desire
The strength of youth (that is another fault Imputed to old age), more than, when young, I wished to be a bull or elephant. What nature gives to man, that let him use: Still fit your work according to your strength. Who can be more absurd, than Milo was; When he saw athletes exercise themselves In throwing spears, he bared his arms, and said, 'Alas, alas, the strength of these is dead.' No more than you, you triflers: 'twas alone Your chest and brawny arms that gave you fame.

Great lawyers, whom I easily could name,

23 Milo of Crotona, a famous athlete, many times victor at the Olympian and Pythian games.
24 Milton, in Samson Agonistes, says:
'O impotence of mind, in body strong!
But what is strength without a double share
Of wisdom! vast, unwieldy, burdensome,
Proudly secure, yet liable to fall
By weakest subtleties, not made to rule,
But to subserve where wisdom bears command.
'God, when he gave me strength, to shew withal
How slight the gift was, hung it in my hair.'
CICERO ON OLD AGE

Have never said such things: to their latest breath
They but increased their knowledge. Orators—Ah, these indeed may weaken in old age:
Their calling asks not intellect alone
But strength of lung: and yet the ringing note
Which voices have, increases in old age,
I don't know how: I have not lost mine yet:
You know my years: but still an old man's speech
Should be pitched low, restrained: and often-times
A clever old man's quiet eloquence
An audience wins. If you cannot attain
To this yourself, you can at least instruct
Scipio and Lælius: for what more sweet
Than old age still surrounded by the stir
Of youthful interests: and shall we not
Allow to age the strength to educate
And teach our youth, and show them how to bear
Official duty? no more glorious task.
Yes, I remember how the Scipios,
And your grandfathers, still seemed fortunate
In having youths around them: nor indeed
As teachers of the arts are men esteemed
Less good, that age and loss of strength has come.
Aye, and that loss of strength is often traced
To youthful folly, and not age: and so
A careless and intemperate youth may hand
A worn-out body to our later years.
Thus Cyrus, as we learn from Xenophon,
In that discourse, when on the brink of death,
Declared that he had never felt his age
CICERO ON OLD AGE

More feeble than his youth. Myself I knew Metellus as a boy, who having served A second consulship was after made Chief Pontiff, and retained that dignity For two and twenty years, to the very last So full of strength as never to regret The loss of youth. About myself no need To speak, although it is an old man’s way Permitted to our years. You know of course How Homer tells, how Nestor still proclaimed His own good qualities, though even then, ‘Two generations full had passed away’: Yet he’d no fear, that thus in telling truth He should be thought too proud or talkative: For from his mouth there flowed, as honey sweet, Discourse, which needed not the strength of youth To sweeten it. The famous Grecian chief Ne’er wished ten men like Ajax, but declared

25 L. Cæcilius Metellus, distinguished in the Carthaginian wars. Consul 251 B.C., and again in 249 B.C.
26 Cf. Homer, II. i. 249:
‘Nestor, the leader of the Pylian host, The smooth-tongued chief from whose persuasive lips Sweeter than honey flowed the stream of speech. Two generations of the sons of men For him were past and gone, who with himself Were born and bred on Pylos’ lovely shore, And o’er the third he now held royal sway.’

27 Cf. Homer, II. ii. 371—translated by Lord Derby:
‘To whom the monarch Agamemmon thus: “Father in council of the sons of Greece, None can compare with thee: and would to Jove, To Pallas and Apollo, at my side I had but ten such counsellors as thee! Then soon should royal Priam’s city fall.”’

19
CICERO ON OLD AGE

With ten like Nestor, Troy would sooner fall.

And now as to myself. At eighty years

I wish I felt like Cyrus, yet can say

That though my strength is not as when I fought

In the ranks, or Quæstor in the Punic Wars,

Nor when in Spain as Consul, nor again

At famed Thermopylae, yet as you see

Old age has not exhausted, worn me out:

Nor does the Senate house, nor yet the stage

From which we speak, my clients or my friends

Or foreign guests find all my vigour gone.

I ne’er admit the truth of that old saw

So much paraded, if you wish to have

A long old age, begin it in good time,

Be old in youth: myself I’d rather be

Old for a shorter time, than old when young:

So no one ever came for my advice

Whom I denied, as being too much engaged.

'Tis true my strength’s not yours; but yet your own

Is not like that of Pontius: is he then

A better man than you? Let there but be

A careful husbanding of strength: let each

In due proportion work: and we shall have

In such no vain regrets for loss of strength.

Milo, 'tis said, upon the Olympic course

Once carried a live bullock on his back:

Then would you rather have that strength of his

Than the intellectual vigour, which adorned Pythagoras? Use then the gifts you have:

Pontius is unknown; his strength has not preserved his memory.
CICERO ON OLD AGE

When gone, regret them not: unless as men
You are to ask for boyhood to return,
When older ask for youth: there still must be
A certain lapse of years; one only way
Nature pursues, and that a simple one:
To each is given what is fit for him.
The boy is weak: youth is more full of fire:
Increasing years have more of sobriety:
And so in age there is a ripeness too.
Each should be garnered at its proper time,
And made the most of. Scipio, I think
You know full well what your grandfather's
friend,
Old Masinissa does at ninety years:
When he's begun a journey on his feet
He never mounts a horse: when on a horse
He ne'er gets down again; no showers, no cold,
Can ever make him cover up his head.
His frame possesses such solidity
That all the functions, duties of a king,
He still discharges. Thus by temperance
And moderation you can still retain
Some of your early vigour.

But you say

Old age is weak: you do not need it strong:
And so our customs and our laws alike
Provide that we are free from all the tasks
That call for strength. We therefore are not
asked
The impossible to do, nor all we can.
But many old men have so little strength

29 Masinissa, King of the Numidians, who died at the age of ninety-seven.
That they no duties can perform at all, 
Nor office hold. 'Tis not the fault of age, 
But of ill-health. How weak you know the son 
Of Africanus, who adopted you, 
How frail his health: nay, rather none at all. 
Had it not been so, how he would have shone, 
Another bright light in this State of ours; 
A greater mind, he had ev'n reached beyond 
His father's greatness. Is it strange at all 
Old men are weak, when youth sometimes itself 
Is weak as well? And so we must, dear friends, 
Fight still against old age, and all its faults 
Endeavour to make good by taking pains: 
Fight it, as we would fight disease; attend 
To health; use moderate exercise; of food 
And drink as much as will sustain our strength, 
Not burden it. Nor is the body all:
That must be cared for, but far more than it 
The soul, the intellect; unless you feed
Them like a lamp with oil, they soon go out 
When age comes on. By constant exercise 
The body grows more heavy; but the mind 
More light and nimble. When Cæcilius speaks
'Of the old comic fools,' he means the men
Who're easily deluded, credulous,
Forgetful: these are not old age's faults,
But of an old age that has gone to sleep,
Is idle, lazy. Just as wantonness
And dissoluteness are the faults of youth;
And not of age: yet not of every youth,
But of the bad; just so that senile dotage
Which we call imbecility belongs
To the old who are lightheaded, not to all.
CICERO ON OLD AGE

Appius, though old and blind as well, controlled
Four sons, five daughters, and a great array
Of clients, with a large establishment:
His mind was always on the stretch, nor did
He e'er in slothfulness give way to age:
Not only did he wield authority,
But ruled with strictness: in his household feared,
With awe regarded by his children, held
By all to be sagacious; in his house
The good old fashion and the discipline,
That fathers used to wield, did still prevail.
Old age, in fact, enjoys respect as long
As it asserts itself, maintains its power,
Is thrall to none, and to its latest breath
Asserts a just authority. So I
Approve a youth who for his years is old,
And like an old man who is somewhat young.
Who aims at this, however old he be,
Will still in heart be young. I now myself
Am busy writing down my seventh book
Of Origins: and for it I collect
The records of the past. Then I arrange
The speeches made in all my famous suits.30
Write treatises on law; read much in Greek:
And like the old Pythagorean School,
Each day what I have said, or heard, or done,
Commit to writing, with a view to keep
My memory good. This keeps my mind in trim,
And trains the intellect. While toiling thus
And labouring still, I feel but little need

30 Cicero says in another place he had read one hundred and fifty of the speeches of Cato.
CICERO ON OLD AGE

Of others’ strength. I’m ready for my friends
To plead their cause: and in the Senate still
Am often found, and there bring forward things
I’ve thought on long and much, and these
support
By strength not of the body, but the mind;
E’en could I not do this, I could enjoy
My couch, and muse on what I could not do.
’Tis my past life that makes this possible.
For living in the midst of these pursuits
And labours one does not observe the time
When age creeps on. So, by degrees, in stealth
Our life comes to a close, no sudden break,
But slowly going out by lapse of years.

XII.
Thirdly, it is alleged against old age,
It has no sensual pleasures to enjoy.
Divinest gift of age, to take away
What is the greatest blot on youthful years!
Hear, my dear friends, a speech Archytas made
(Who was a very old and famous man),
And told me at Tarentum, where I was
With Quintus Maximus, when quite a youth:
‘No greater curse than sensuality
Has Nature given to man: its foul desires
To feed, lust grows unbridled and unwise;
Hence countries are betrayed, states over-
thrown,
Secret arrangements with our foes are made.
There is no crime, no ill deed to which lust

51 Archytas of Tarentum, a philosopher of the School of Pytha-
goras, but who nevertheless was chosen seven times as general
of the armies of Tarentum. Horace has addressed an ode to
him.
CICERO ON OLD AGE

Cannot entice: abominable vice
Of every kind is due to this alone.
Nature herself, or some kind deity
Has given to man no greater gift than mind:
But to this gift, this faculty divine,
No greater enemy can be than lust.
When that bears sway, all moderation's gone,
And 'neath its rule virtue cannot survive.
To understand this better, just conceive
A man who is entirely slave to lust.
No one can think, that while he so remains,
His mind, his reason, and his power of thought
Can aught effect of good: so nothing is
More hateful and more dangerous than lust:
Since as it stronger grows, with firmer seat,
In time the soul's light is extinguished.'
These were the words Archytas then addressed
To Caius Pontius, sire of him who won
The battle at the Caudine Forks: 32 my friend
Nearchus of Tarentum, who remained
Loyal to Rome, he told me he had heard
The story from some old man, who declared
Plato himself was present at the time.
Why do I tell you this? That you may see
If this same lust cannot be overcome
By wisdom and philosophy: we owe
Great thanks to age, which thus ennobles us
That we no longer have desire for that
We know is wrong. Lust hinders proper thought,

32 It was, according to Livy, C. Pontius, a Samnite, who de-
feated the Romans at the Caudine Forks. Cicero seems to have
made a mistake in taking the son for the father.

25
CICERO ON OLD AGE

Is reason’s foe, the mind’s eye renders blind,
Has no companionship in virtue’s ways.
Most sorry was I that I had to expel
Flaminius\(^{33}\) from the Senate, who had been
Already Consul, but it was a case
Most gross in character: for when in Gaul
He yielded to his paramour’s advice,
When dining with her, to behead a man
In custody upon a serious charge.
His brother Titus in the year before
Acquitted him: Flaccus and I could not;
It was a case so gross and criminal,
Not only bringing personal disgrace,
But grave discredit on the State itself.

I’ve heard it said by older men than me,
Who had in boyhood heard it from their sires,
Fabricius used to wonder, he’d been told,
When envoy with King Pyrrhus, of a man,\(^{34}\)
Reputed a philosopher, who said
That pleasure was to be our guide in life.
That hearing this, our Roman generals,
Curius and Coruncanius, you know,
Were wont to wish the Samnites thought the same,
King Pyrrhus too, for victory would be
Much easier, if they put their pleasures first.
This Curius was the friend of Decius, \(^{33}\)
Who for the State had given away his life.
Fabricius knew him, Coruncanius too,

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\(^{33}\) This was L. Flaminius, brother of T. Flaminius, named at the beginning of the treatise. The story is told in Livy, xxxix. 12; and also by Plutarch in his life of Cato, with some variation.

\(^{34}\) This refers to Epicurus, who died B.C. 270.
And from their own life, and what he had done,
They judged that there was something fair and good
By Nature’s gift, which we should seek to gain,
Which every wise man of his own accord
Scorning, condemning pleasure, would desire.
But why so much of pleasure? Why, you see,
Not only is it no disgrace to age,
But ev’n its greatest merit that it longs
No more for pleasure, cares no more for feasts
With loaded tables and o’er-flowing wine.
It misses too the headache, and the night
Of sickness and of sleeplessness that comes.
If something we must grant to pleasure’s claim:
(It is not easy to resist its charm:
The godlike Plato thinks it is a bait
To catch the foolish, just as fish are caught:)
Though we cannot indulge in gorgeous feasts,
A modest dinner we can still enjoy.
I often saw Duillius as a boy,
’Twas he who first inflicted a defeat
Upon the Carthaginians, coming home
From dinner, where the use of torch and pipes
Had greatly pleased him, although quite unknown
And quite unprecedented in the case
Of private persons; ’twas a privilege
Accorded to his fame. Why speak of these?
Let’s take myself: I always have belonged
To a club; for clubs you know were first begun

Duillius, who inflicted the first naval defeat which Rome won against Carthage, did it by the use of grappling irons, which drew the enemy’s ships towards his own and held them fast.
CICERO ON OLD AGE

When I was Quaestor, when we brought to Rome
The mighty Mother of the Gods from Ida. 36
I dined there with due moderation still:
Although there was a certain fire of youth
Which died away as years advanced: in fact
I measured still my pleasure in these feasts
More by the company and sweet converse,
Than any pleasures of a viler sort.
How happily our ancestors have named
The feast in which friends join 'convivium'—
The life together—seeing it implies
Close fellowship—far better than the Greeks
Who call it by a word that rather means
To drink or eat together: 37 and so mark
What is of least importance.

XIV.
I still delight in talking, and enjoy
Banquets beginning early, not alone
With those of my own age (but few remain),
But with the young, with you: I pay my thanks
To age, which has increased my love of talk,
And has removed desire to eat and drink:
And even if these please (I do not wish
To levy war on pleasure, after all
It is the gift of nature), I can’t see
That age is quite devoid of taste for them.
Myself I love a master of the feast,
As our forefathers had, and let the talk

36 The worship of Cybele was introduced, according to Livy, xxix. 11, in 203 B.C. from Mt. Ida in Phrygia during the war
with Hannibal, in obedience to the command of the oracle at Delphi.

37 The Greeks called it συμπόσιον or συνδείπνιον—a drinking or
eating together.
Go round, as goes the cup: and let the cups, As in the banquet Xenophon describes,\(^{38}\) Be small, and give their contents drop by drop, Well cooled by ice in summer, in the cold Warmed by the sun or fire. Such is the plan I follow at my Sabine seat: each day Invite my neighbours, and prolong the feast With varied talk as far into the night As we can do. But now perhaps you'll say Such tingling pleasure does not thrill old men Like us: we do not want it: and be sure Nothing need trouble, which you do not want. 'Twas Sophocles who said so well when asked If still he loved when old, 'Why, Heaven forbid! I have escaped from that, as though it were A coarse and maddened tyrant.' Possibly To those who like such ways it may seem hard And irksome too without them: but to those Who've had their day of pleasure and of joy, 'Tis pleasanter to want than have: and he Who does not want, cannot be said to lack: So not to want is pleasanter by far. But grant these pleasures are enjoyed by youth More fully, after all they seem to me But trifles, nor does age entirely miss The enjoyment of them, though in less degree. A man in the front seat no doubt enjoys The acting of Ambivius Turpio,\(^{39}\) And so does one who sits in the backmost row,

\(^{38}\) Xenophon says ἢν δὲ ἡμῖν οἱ παιδεῖς μικρὰς κόλλας πάνα ἐπιφανείως — 'if the slaves give us frequent drops in little glasses' — the wine will not affect us.

\(^{39}\) One of the famous actors in the days of Terence.
CICERO ON OLD AGE

Though not so much: so youth with nearer view
Of pleasure is more pleased, yet still old age
Though looking on afar, has its delights
In proper limit. Ah, how great they are;
The soul discharged from service to fell lust,
Ambition, strife, and all the hideous train
Of hatred and desire, is left alone
And dwells apart: and if it only have
Some food for study, and the wish to learn,
Nought can be pleasanter than leisured age.

Thus Caius Gallus, 40 Scipio, we have seen,
Your father's friend, up to his very death
Engaged in mapping out the earth and sky:
How oft when he began his work at eve
The early dawn surprised him; and how oft
When rising early, night still found him there!
How much it pleased him to predict to us
Eclipses of the sun or moon! Again
Take lighter studies, which yet still require
Keenness of wit, what pleasure Nævius 41 took

40 Caius Gallus, an astronomer, when fighting as tribune under
L. Æmilius Paulus against the Macedonians, he warned the
Roman troops not to be alarmed at an eclipse of the moon which
was to take place the following night; it was, he said, a periodic
phenomenon due to natural causes which could be known and pre-
dicted. The Macedonians, on the other hand, were terrified at
the portent. Cf. Livy, xliv. 37.

41 Nævius, the oldest Roman comedian (264–194 B.C.), who also
wrote, in the cumbrous Saturnian metre, a history of the Punic
Wars. Plautus, in his Braggart Soldier, v. 211, alludes to his
being put in prison for some of his political diatribes. That he
thought highly of his own ability, his epitaph written by himself
proves:

‘If Gods could ever weep for men below,
The Muses’ tears for Nævius would flow:
For when men ceased to listen to his song,
Latins forgot to speak the Latin tongue.’

30
CICERO ON OLD AGE

In his Punic wars? or Plautus in his plays? Why, Livius Andronicus I have seen myself, although his first play was produced some seven years before my birth took place. Why speak of Crassus and his legal lore? Of Publius Scipio, who was lately made High Pontiff? all of these I've named, we've seen in age still burning study to pursue. Or take Cethegus, whom our enemies termed Rightly the quintessence of eloquence, What pains he took in speaking when quite old? Pray where in feasts, or games, or mistresses Are pleasures such as these to be enjoyed? And these pursuits, with learning for their goal, To those who're prudent and well taught, still grow With growing years: as Solon says so well Whom I've already quoted, every day. He learned something new: nought can surpass Such pleasures of the mind.

And now I come

42 Plautus came after Nævius (254–184 B.C.). In contradistinction to his predecessor, of whom we have no complete remains, we have no less than twenty of his comedies. Livius Andronicus, the earliest Roman poet (235–200 B.C.), turned the Odyssey into Saturnian verse. He was a slave from Greece, and was tutor to the young of many noble families.

43 Cethegus died 196 B.C. Ennius calls him 'Suavi loquente ore.'

44 Cf. Lucretius, ii. 5:

‘But yet more sweet
On Wisdom’s height serene to plant our feet,
And learning from the wise of other days
To watch the many wandering in a maze,
Seeking in vain to find the way of life,
Engaged for ever in a constant strife.’
CICERO ON OLD AGE

To those which farmers feel,⁴⁵ in which I take
A vast delight: and which, at any rate,
No age can hinder, and which seem to me
To approach the ideal of a wise man's life.
They have to deal with earth, obedient earth,
Which ever gives back more than it receives:
It may be sometimes more, or sometimes less:
But as for me, 'tis not the crop alone
That I delight in, but the natural force
And vigour of the soil: which first receives
Into its lap, all smoothed and broken up,
The scattered seed: then keeps it hidden there:
The harrowing which hides it, takes its name
From a word that means to hide: and then
when warmed
By its heat and close embrace, it splits it up,
And you can see the young green shoot appear,
Which drawing vigour from the roots, grows up:
And by its jointed stalk still held erect
Is enclosed within a sheath, from which in time,
When it escapes, you find the ear of corn
Ranged in a spike, protected in due course
By a palisade of awns, from little birds.
Why should I speak about the vines we plant,

⁴⁵ This reminds us of Virgil's
'O fortunatos nimium sua si bona norint
Agricolas! quibus ipsa procul discordibus armis
Fundit humo facilem victum justissima tellus.'
Geor. ii. 458.

'Oh, happy, happy toilers in the fields,
If thine own happiness thou didst but know,
Spoilt child of Fortune! For thy simple wants,
Far from the clash of armoured battle, Earth,
The ever faithful, from a willing lap
Scatters her ready store.'

Lord Burghclere.

32
Their growth and increase? For of these I ne'er
Can have enough, that you may know the peace
And pleasure that surrounds my later years.
And here I leave aside the natural strength
Of all that earth produces, which can bring
From the fig's minutest seed, the pip of grape,
Or from the little grains of other plants,
Such mighty trunks and branches. Mallet-
shoots. 46
Slips, cuttings, quicksets, layers, are not these
Enough to fill one with a strange delight?
The vine is naturally prone to droop,
And, if not propped, it falls: to raise itself
Tendrils, like hands, lay hold of all that's near.
And when it spreads in wild and wandering
course,
The pruner's skill restrains it, lest it grow
Too much, and spread its shoots too far abroad.
And so when spring comes in, in those he leaves,
At every joint is found an eye: from which
there springs
The grape, which fed by moisture from the
earth,
And the sun's kind warmth, grows on: to taste
at first
Quite bitter, in the end as it matures
Becoming sweet: 'neath tendrils hidden away,
It still enjoys a moderate heat, and yet
Wards off the sun's fierce rays: say what can be
More gladdening than its fruit, more fair to see?
Its usefulness is not its only charm:

46 Mallet-shoots are hammer-shaped slips of trees or shrubs for
planting.
CICERO ON OLD AGE

Its nature, and its culture, these I love:
The stays in rows, the tying of the tops,
Layering and propagation of the vines,
Some shoots cut off, others allowed to grow,
All this I love to watch: and then again
There is the irrigation of the soil,
The digging and the trenching, which increase
Its fruitfulness. I have already dealt,
In the treatise which I wrote on farming things,
With what concerns manure: which Hesiod
So strangely missed, though Homer long before
Depicts Laertes, 47 mourning for his son,
Soothing himself by culture of his land,
Manuring it. Nor is it only in the fields,
The meadows, and the vineyards, and the woods,
A farmer’s life is pleasant: still there are
The gardens and the orchards, flocks of sheep,
And swarms of bees, and flowers of varied hue.
Nor is it planting only that delights:
There is the grafting, cleverest device
That gardeners use.

I might go on for long
To tell the pleasures of a country life:
Perhaps I’ve said too much; and yet I think
You’ll pardon: farming is an old pursuit,
I long have followed: and old men will talk.
I do not wish to minimise their faults.

47 Cf. Homer, Ὀδ. xxiv. 224; translated by Morris:
‘So his father he found, who alone in the ordered garth abode,
About a vine stock digging: in a kirtle foul was he clad,
All patched and right unseemly, and bound round his legs he had
Greaves clouted.’
The word rendered by ‘digging’ has nothing to do with manure; but still, Laertes may have been digging it in.
CICERO ON OLD AGE

There's Manius Curius when he had subdued The Samnites, Sabines, and King Pyrrhus, too: This was the life he chose: and when I see His villa ('tis not far away from mine), I can't too much admire his temperate life, And the spirit of the age. One day when he Was sitting by his hearth, the Samnites brought A load of gold; he would not look at it; To have the gold would bring no fame to him: But those to conquer, who possessed the gold. Such a great heart, how could it but secure A happy old age? Now let me return To farming (not to leave my own pursuit). In former days our Senators had farms: And Cincinnatus was behind the plough When made Dictator: 'twas at his command That Spurius Mælius was condemned to death For treason. These old men, when on their farms Received their call the Senate to attend, And those who called were so named 'travellers. Think you their old age was a poor affair, Because their heart was in their farm? I think No life could be more happy, not alone Because it benefits the human race,

48 Manius Curius, a humble farmer, who was three times Consul (290, 275, 274 B.C.). He successfully opposed the Samnites, and later defeated Pyrrhus, without ceasing to be a simple Sabine farmer and to cultivate his own land. When the Samnites came to him on the occasion Cicero speaks of they found him roasting turnips at his fire.

49 Cincinnatus, a favourite hero of the Roman Republic: about 519-439 B.C. He was twice appointed Dictator, once to fight against the Æquians, and later to oppose the machinations of Sp. Mælius, whom he put to death.
CICERO ON OLD AGE

But for the charm it has, and the supply
Of all that is required for food of men,
Or for the worship of the Gods above.
As these are what men want, let’s make our peace
With pleasure and be friends. The prudent man,
Who labours hard, still has his cellars filled,
His larder and his oil store, and his house
Is well equipped; with pigs, and goats, and lambs,
Fowls, milk, and cheese: and honey from the hive.
Their garden too they call their ‘second flitch.’
And then the interest that these arouse
Is further heightened in their leisure hours
By shooting and by hunting. Need I speak
Of the greenery of the meadows, and the lines
Of trees, the beauty of the vineyards, and the groves
Of olives? In a single word I ask
Is aught more rich in use, more fair to see
Than land well cultured? To enjoy its charm
Age does not hinder, rather it invites
And lures you to it. Where, I’d like to know,
Would one’s old years be better warmed by fire,
Or sitting in the sun, or, if need be,
Be cooled in turn by shade, and flowing stream?
Let who will keep their arms, their steeds, their spears,
Their club and ball, and let them swim and run,
But let them leave from many forms of sport

50 In rural districts some bacon was salted for the farmer’s use; but his garden was his second flitch—something in reserve to cut at.
CICERO ON OLD AGE

The dice to us old men, or take them too
If so they will: old age can do without
These trifles, and enjoy full happiness.

The works of Xenophon are useful books:
Read them with care, as now I know you do.
At what great length is agriculture praised
In that in which he speaks of managing
One’s own affairs, the Economicus?
That you may know how worthy of a king
He thinks this farming is, he there relates
What Socrates once said to Critobulus:
How Cyrus, the young Persian prince, renowned
For intellect and his imperial rule,
When once Lysander, a distinguished man,
Had come to Sardis, bringing gifts with him
From his allies, he there most courteously
Received him, and with other things he showed
A field he’d planted with the utmost care.
And when Lysander wondered at the height
The trees had reached, so carefully arranged
Like spots on dice, the soil so clear of weeds,
So fully dug, the sweetly-scented flowers,
He said ’twas not so much the diligence
That he admired, as ’twas the skill of him
Who planned and laid it out; the prince replied,
‘I did it all myself: these rows are mine,
The plans are mine, and many of the trees
Were planted by myself’; Lysander then,
Seeing the splendour with which he was clad,
The purple robe, the gold; the many gems,
Said, ‘Well, indeed, I’ve heard that you are
blessed,
Whose lot’s thus worthy of your character.’
CICERO ON OLD AGE

This lot let old men prize: years don’t impede
Our studying many things, and most of all
These rural tastes to the very end of life:
Valerius Corvus, we have heard, pursued
Them even when he had a hundred years:
And six and forty years had intervened
Between his first and latest consulship.
The very term, our ancestors declared, 51
At which old age began, was fully spent
By him in office: yet his latest years
Were happier than his prime, for he enjoyed
More of authority, and less of toil.
Authority is still the crown of age.
How splendid was Cæcilius Metellus!
How great Atilius Calatinus, too,
The man whose only epitaph was this,
‘By the people’s vote, the first man in the
State.’ 53

‘Tis carved upon his tomb. He had indeed
Wide influence, when such the verdict is
That history gives. And what a man, again,
Was Crassus, late High Pontiff, and not less
His great successor, Lepidus? Why speak
Of Paulus, Africanus, Maximus?
Not by their speech, but by their very nod
They ruled the Senate. Yes, old age has
weight,
Which crowned with honour far exceeds the
bliss
Which pleasure brings to youth.

51 Old age was supposed to begin at sixty years.
32 This was the inscription on his tomb near the Porta Capena.
He distinguished himself in the Punic Wars.
Old age, remember that I mean the age
That has been trained in youth. For that is true
Which I once stated with consent of all,
That age is wretched which is still obliged
To excuse itself. 'Tis not indeed white hairs
And wrinkled brows that bring authority,
But a life well spent in former years that reaps
Great influence at the last. Ev'n little things
That seem but trifles, these can show respect:
To be saluted, to be widely sought,
For men to make way for you, and to rise
When you approach, to escort you on the way,
And bring you back, to seek for your advice;
All these are used among ourselves, and those
Whose culture is the highest. Thus it was
Lysander, whom I named, was wont to say
That Sparta was the honoured home of age:
Nowhere was greater tribute paid to years,
Nowhere was age respected more. 'Tis said
At Athens once, an old man made his way
To where the games were held: in all the crowd
Not one gave way; but when he came to Sparta,
Ev'n the ambassadors, in special seats,
All rose to welcome him. When they received
A storm of cheers, a man remarked to them,
'The Athenians know what's right, but do it not.'
Much in our guild here is most excellent,
But this is best, that he who has most years

53 Cf. Shakespeare, Macbeth, v. 3:

'That which should accompany old age,
As honour, love, obedience, troops of friends.'

54 The guild was the college of Augurs.
CICERO ON OLD AGE

Speaks first, and that not only before those Who've held a higher office, but even those Who hold it now. What pleasures can compare With the rewards thus waiting on old age? They who've enjoyed them well, they seem to me To have played life's drama to its very close, Not like unpractised actors to have failed At the last act.

Yes, but you say old men Are sly morose and fretful, angry too, And difficult to manage; if you choose, Add greedy. These are faults of character, And not of years. And yet this fretfulness And the other faults I named have this excuse, Not valid, but yet which may be advanced. They think they are despised, contemned and mocked;

And when you're feeble, every offence More hateful is: yet all these things become By temper and by management less hard, That you may see in life, as in the play That's called the Brothers 55: what a difference Between the two; one harsh, severe,
The other gracious, mild: just so things are:
Not every wine grows sour by growing old.
Severity in age is well enough:
But not too much, and naught of bitterness. And as to greediness, I do not know
What it can mean. Can aught be more absurd Than that as life draws to a close, we seek More money to assist our journey's end?

55 The Adelphs of Terence, in which two brothers are represented—one from the country, the other from the town.
A fourth cause there remains which seems to fret
And make our old age anxious; it is
The near approach of death, which cannot be
So far away: oh, miserable age
That has not learned in a life prolonged
That death's not to be feared: if it destroy
The mind, it surely may be quite ignored:
But if it leads it to some other place
Where it may live for ever, it should be
Rather desired. There is no third Estate.
Why should I fear, if I should not exist?
Or if I be more happy than before?
Or who so foolish, even in his youth,
As to feel sure that he will live till eve?
Nay, surely youth has far more ills than age
That may cause death: more frequent its disease,
More serious, and more difficult to cure.
Few reach old age: if that were not the case,
Men had been better, wiser than they are.
In old men you will find more thought, more care,
More method; if it were not so, then States
Had ne'er survived. Yes, but to come again
To fear of early death. Is that the crime
Imputed to old age? Youth fears it too.
Ah, yes, I know it from my own good son,
As you from your own brothers, Scipio, do,
Men marked for highest honours in the State.
The young can die. But you will say the young
Have hope of life, which is to us denied.
A foolish hope. For what more foolish is
Than where no surety is to think things sure,
CICERO ON OLD AGE

Where all is doubtful to believe them fixed?
Granted the old man cannot even hope:
'Tis all the better since he has attained
To what the young man only hopes to gain:
The one desires long life, the other's lived.
And yet, good heavens! what is 'long' in life?
Take ev'n the longest: live, if so you will,
As long as the Tartessian king himself,
King Agathonius, as he was called; 56
For he, I learn, at Gades held the throne
For eighty years, and lived for forty more.
Nothing seems long to me which has an end.
When that arrives, the past is dead and gone:
And that alone survives, which you have won
By virtue and good deeds. Time flies, and days,
And months, and years pass on: the past no more
Returns, and of the future no man knows.
Let each think what he has of life enough.
Why ev'n the actor to secure applause
Need not play to the end: if but he do
His best, he will be cheered: if wise, he'll stop
Before he reach the final 'Plaudite' 57
A little time's enough, in which to live
A good and honest life. If more you have,

56 The story of Agathonius, the King of Tartessus, is told in Herod. i. 163. Gades is Cadiz. Some put his age at one hundred and forty.

57 'Plaudite' was the formal ending in Latin comedies. So Horace, Ars poet. 155:
'Sessuri cantor donec vos Plaudite dicat.'
Cicero speaks in the spirit of the closing words of the Meditations of Marcus Antoninus: 'But,' says the actor, 'I have not gone through the five acts; I have only done three.' . . . 'Go away content, for he who dismisses you is so.'

42
CICERO ON OLD AGE

You need not grieve more than the farmer does,
When the sweet Spring-time's passed, if there arrive
The summer and the autumn in their turn. Springs represent our youth, and indicates
The harvest that will follow: later years Are used to reap and gather in the crop. The harvest of old age, as oft I've said,
Is the remembrance and the plenteous store Of blessings won. And all that nature does Must be accounted good. What can be more According to her plan, than that the old Should die? Death even comes to youth itself, Against its will and wish. To them it comes It seems to me, as when a fire is quenched By streams of water: to the old it comes As when a fire, dies slowly down itself: Just so the apples, when unripe, are torn With violence from the boughs: if ripe with age They gently fall: and so the life of youth Is taken by some violent attack;
The old man’s troublous age comes gently to an end.
To me this seems so pleasant, that I feel

58 Sir W. Scott in one of the passages from an old play in *The Antiquary* which, when he could not find one to his taste, he wrote himself, has another metaphor to the same end:

‘Life ebbs from such old age unmarked and silent:
On the slow, majestic waves yon stranded ship,
Each wave receding, shakes it less and less,
Till, bedded in the sand, it shall remain
Useless and motionless.’
CICERO ON OLD AGE

The nearer that I draw towards the end, I sight the land, and see before my eyes The harbour waiting to receive the bark Which long has voyaged on the toilsome sea.

All ages have their term; old age has none; Enough if you but use it rightly still, And do your duty in the post you fill, And have no fear of death. And so it is That age is bolder and more confident Than youth itself. Thus Solon once replied To one who asked him what made him so strong, 'Tis my old age.' That end of life is best, When with the mind and senses unimpaired, Nature undoes the work that she has made, Just as a ship or building is destroyed By those who made them with the greater ease; So Nature that has made our frame, itself More easily takes it down. A building new Is hardly rent asunder, but when old It falls with ease. The little span of life That now remains must not be grasped by us With eager longing, nor yet laid aside Without some thought. Pythagoras has said We must not leave our station in the ranks, The fort we hold, except at God's command, Who is our leader. Solon too was wise, Whose epitaph declares he did not wish His death to lack the sorrow of his friends

Cicero himself seems to have acted on this feeling. In one of his later letters (May, 44 B.C.) he writes: 'Brutus seems to think of retiring into exile. For my part I look to another haven which lies handier to my time of life: all I wish is that I could reach it, leaving Brutus in prosperity and the Republic re-established.'
And their sad tears; \(^{60}\) he still desired their love. Yet Ennius perhaps is wiser still:

'Let none with tears my funeral adorn:
No loud lamentings, when my corse is borne.'

For death he thought was not a cause for grief, When immortality awaits us there. Of course an old man feels the sense of dying, But 'tis but for a little time: and then Our feeling altogether disappears,

Or else 'tis something pleasant that we feel. Yet youth should still take care betimes to learn That death should not be feared; if 'tis not so, We cannot have a quiet, tranquil mind. 'Tis sure that death must come: perhaps to-day, But if we live in constant dread of it, Whose mind can be in peace? Upon this point I need not waste my words, when I recall The case of Brutus \(^{61}\) dying for the State: The Decii \(^{62}\) who spurred their horses on And courted death: nor Regulus \(^{63}\) himself

\(^{60}\) The original is given in Plutarch:

\[\text{μηδὲ μοι ἄκλαντος θάνατος μόλις, ἀλλὰ φιλοίκων καλλίποιμι βασιλέω δίκαια καὶ σωφρονης.} \]

'Ah, may my death be not unwept: for long
May tears and sorrow dwell my friends among.'

\(^{61}\) Junius Brutus, who died fighting against the Tarquins in the early days of Rome. He had previously put his two sons to death for wishing to restore the monarchy.

\(^{62}\) Decius and his son both sacrificed their lives, the one in the war against the Latins at Vesuvius (340 B.C.); the other at Sentinum (295 B.C.).

\(^{63}\) M. Atilius Regulus, who was taken prisoner by the Carthaginians, and sent to Rome to offer peace on condition of returning to his enemies if unsuccessful. Cf. Hor. \textit{Odes}, iii. 5:

'Full well he knew he must abide
The savage captor's torturing wrath;
Yet none the less he thrust aside
Obstructing kin, and all that barred his path.'

45
CICERO ON OLD AGE

Who rather than his plighted word should fail
Invited torture: nor the Scipios
Who with their bodies chose to bar the advance
Of the Carthaginian host: nor Lucius Paullus,64
Your grandfather, who with his life atoned
His colleague's rashness in the great defeat
At Cannæ we sustained: nor yet again
Marcellus, whom not ev'n the cruellest foes
Refused to bury with becoming rites:
And see our armies: oft as I have said,
They take their stand with brave and gallant
hearts,
At posts from which they know they won't
return.
What this, which younger men can thus despise,
Unlearned and ignorant, shall we who're old
Intently dread, with all our learning too?
To put it in a word, it seems to me
'Tis weariness of all pursuits that makes
A weary age. We have pursuits as boys,
Do young men want them? Others yet there are
Suited to growing years, are they required
By those who've reached what's termed 'the
middle age'?
That too enjoys its own, but are they fit
For us old men? We have our own of course,
And as the others end, just so do ours,
And when it happens, weariness of life

64 Paullus died at the battle of Cannæ. Horace says, Od. i. 12:
"Paulus, of his life
So lavish in the Punic strife."

He refused to fly when he might have done so. M. Marcellus,
Consul, fell into an ambuscade near Tarentum in the second
Punic War, and was buried by Hannibal, whose inhuman cruelty
was a commonplace with Roman writers.
CICERO ON OLD AGE

Proclaims that ripeness which precedes our death.

Nor do I see why I should not declare
My feeling as to death: the nearer 'tis,
The more distinctly I can see its face.
I verily believe, dear friends, your sires
Are living still—the only life which counts.
For while enclosed within this mortal frame,
Our work is done with something of a strain,
Imposed by fate: and the celestial soul,
Sunk from its high estate and plunged in earth,
Is fated here to live, a place opposed
To its divine, immortal quality.
I take it, the Eternal Gods have sent
These souls to fill our bodies, that there might
Be some to watch on earth who, having seen
What order reigns in heaven, might introduce
Like method and like constancy below.
Nor is it only reason thus inclines
And argument to give me this belief,
But the wide fame and great authority
Of all the best philosophers I know:
I used to hear Pythagoras and his school,
Natives of Italy, at least in name,
Declare unfalteringly, that we had souls
Distilled from the divine intelligence.

XXI. Cato's own hope for the future.

Pythagoras was a Greek philosopher, born about 580 B.C.,
who in the end established himself and his followers at Crotona
in the south of Italy. He believed in the transmigration of souls,
and devoted himself to the moral reform of society. He believed
in one God—eternal, unchangeable, ruling all things; that the
soul was a harmony, that the body was its prison in which it was
disciplined for a divine life after death. Mr. Warde Fowler, in his
Religious Experience of the Romans, speaks of the change that took
place in Cicero's views under his distress at the death of his darling
Tullia (pp. 388-9).
And there was shown to me the fine discourse
Which Socrates, the wisest man that lived,
According to Apollo's oracle, 66
Pronounced upon the last day that he lived,
Regarding souls, their immortality.

Need I say more? My firm belief it is, 67
Since there is such a nimbleness in souls,
Such power to recall the past, to see beyond,
Such wondrous skill, such knowledge to invent,
The nature which contains them cannot be
Destined to death: nor yet can they themselves
Always in action, by their own impulse,
E'er cease to move according as they will.

And yet again, the nature of the soul

66 The story is told in Plato's Apology of Socrates. The oracle, when consulted, said:
'Sophocles is wise: Euripides wiser still:
But wisest by far is Socrates.'

Milton writes (Paradise Regained, iv. 275):
'Whom well inspired the oracle pronounced
Wisest of men.'

67 Phædo of Plato. The argument which follows is based on that in the discourse which describes the death of Socrates—an attempt, as Milton says,

'To unsphere
The spirit of Plato; to unfold
What worlds or what vast regions hold
The immortal mind that hath forsook
Her mansion in this fleshly nook.'

Il Penseroso, 88–93.

Addison, in his tragedy of Cato, writes (Act v., Sc. 1):
'It must be so—Plato, thou reasonest well,
Else whence this pleasing hope, this fond desire,
This longing after immortality?
Or whence this secret dread, and inward horror
Of falling into naught? Why shrinks the soul
Back on herself and startles at destruction?
'Tis the divinity that stirs within us:
'Tis heaven itself that points out an hereafter,
And intimates eternity to man.'
CICERO ON OLD AGE

Is of one character, has nothing mixed,
Unequal or unlike itself, and so it comes
It cannot be divided, cannot die.
Again, 'tis clear that men know many things
Before their birth, for boys you often see,
In studies that are difficult, attain
Such knowledge of them with such headlong speed,
That needs must be they've known it all before,
And but recall them from their memories.
And this indeed was Plato's argument.

Once more, in Xenophon we find described
How Cyrus spoke upon his dying bed:
'Think not, my sons, when I depart from you,
That I shall nothing be, be nowhere found.
While I was with you, you ne'er saw my soul,
But from the things I did, you knew 'twas there;
So now believe that I am still the same,
Although unseen. The honours that are paid
To our great men would not survive their death,
If 'twere not that their souls had something done
To keep their memory green. I can't believe
That souls, when in our mortal bodies, live,
But leaving it they die; nor yet that they
Do then become as unintelligent
As is the body which they leave behind.
Oh, no; when they are freed from this vile clod,
And have put on their spotless purity,
Then wisdom comes. Now when our mortal frame
Dissolves in death, you easily can see
How all its elements depart, how all
Return but to the dust from which they came:
CICERO ON OLD AGE

The soul you cannot see, nor here, nor there, Nothing is more alike to death than sleep. And when men sleep the soul gives evidence That it's divine: for when it's free to move, Left to itself, it sees what lies before, Hence you can gather what it will become When it has shaken off these mortal chains. If this be so, then treat me as a God: But if the soul dies when the body dies, Yet still do you, from reverence of the Gods, Who watch and rule this beauteous world of ours, Still keep my memory aye intact and green.'

XXIII. Thus Cyrus, on his deathbed. Now for home. No one will ever make me to believe, Scipio, that those great heroes of the past, The members of your family, and the rest Had dared such deeds, as live for evermore In the memories of men, had they not thought The future did belong to them as well. Think you (that I about myself may boast, As old men do), I'd ever have endured Such toil by day and night, at home, abroad, If the same term which closed my life, should close My glory too? Had it not better been To lead a quiet, indolent old age, No bother and no strife? Yes, but my soul, Raising itself, I know not how, foresaw That in the future, when it left this life,
CICERO ON OLD AGE

Its life would then begin. Had it not been
That immortality belonged to souls,
The souls of great men never would have sought
The glory that's immortal. Wise men die
With greatest readiness, and fools with least.
And don't you think the soul, which further sees
And sees more clearly, knows there is beyond
A brighter world, to which it wings its way?
Not so the soul that's duller. For myself
I long to see your father, whom I loved
And treasured here: nor those alone I knew,
But all the men of whom I've heard, and read,
And written, too. And therefore when I start
Upon my voyage, none shall keep me back,
Or boil me as another Pelias. 69
Nay, if some God should offer to me now
Once more to be a boy, and shed sad tears
Within my cradle, I'd refuse the gift.
Nor do I wish, my course being fully run,
To leave the winning for the starting post.

What good in life? rather how much of toil?
Yet still if good there be, whate'er it is
There is a limit to it, there succeeds.
A natural weariness. I do not wish
Like many learned men to run down life.
I don't regret that I have lived, because
I've lived, I hope, that I may well believe
I have not lived in vain. I now depart

69 Pelias, son of Poseidon, brother of Æson, was the ruler of
Iolcos, which rightfully belonged to Æson and his son Jason.
Æson when old had, according to Ovid, been successfully treated
by Medea, who boiled him to renew his youth. She afterwards
persuaded Pelias' daughters to attempt the same experiment on
their father—this time [without result. I give one or two lines
CICERO ON OLD AGE

As from a lodging house, and not a home. Nature has made this world a place in which One stays a little, does not dwell for aye. O glorious day, when I shall go to meet That blest assembly of the souls above, And leave the filth, the bustle of the world. I go to meet not those alone I've named, But my dear Cato, best of sons to me, A better man, more pious, never lived, Whose corse I burned; it would have been more fit If he'd burned mine—ah, yes. But his great soul, Not leaving me, but ever looking back, Has gone where he discerned that I would go. I seemed to bear it bravely: not because of Sandys' translation of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, where the story is told. Medea is speaking to the daughters:

'Then wherefore stand ye doubting thus, like fools,' Medea said; 'Oh, draw your swordes, and let ye out his old blood that I may Fill up his empty veins again with youthful blood straightway. Your father's life is in your hands: it lieth now in you To have him old and withered still, or young and lustie too. If any nature in ye be, and that ye do not feede A fruitless hope, your duty to your father doe with speede.'

Cicero seems to have confused the cases. It was Æson who was boiled and rejuvenated.

'His leane, pale, bare, and withered corse grew fulsome fair and fresh, His furrowed wrinkles were fulfilled with young and lusty flesh; His limmes waxt frolicksome and lithe; at which he wondering much Remembered that at forty years he was the same or such.'

Medea thus describes her power:

'By charms I make the calm seas rough, and make the rough sea plain. And cover all the sky with clouds, and chase them thence again. Nor have I neede of herbes that can, by virtue of their juice, To flowery prime of lusty youth, old, withered age reduce.'
CICERO ON OLD AGE

I did not feel it: I consoled myself
By thinking that the time could not be long
Ere I must go, and parting be no more.

Well, Scipio (for I think you said that you
Expressed the same surprise as Lælius),
'Tis thus old age sits very light on me,
Not only not a burden, but a joy.
But if in thinking souls immortal thus,
I am in error, I confess to you,
It is an error that I glory in,
And being so pleasant, I would not desire
To lose it while I live: but if when dead,
As some philosophers of little note
Believe, I feel no more, there is no fear
These dead philosophers should mock me there.
And even if we should not be immortal,
Still it is well that, at the fitting time,
We all should disappear. Nature has laws
Affecting life as well as other things.
Age is the end of life, as of a play:
We should avoid the weariness that comes,
The more, if we've enjoyed it to the full.
And this is all I have to say of age.
May you both reach it, and experience show,
That you have found that what I've said is true.

70 In the Tusculan Disputations, i. 23, he speaks of philosophers
who differ from Plato and Socrates as 'plebeii philosophi.'
71 The comparison of life to a play upon the stage is common.
There is in the Greek Anthology in McKail's collection the following:

'Life is a stage, a game,
Which all must learn to play:
To lay your sorrows all aside,
Or bear them as you may.'
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