


Cicero on Aging

We must make a stand, Laelius and Scipio, against old age, and its drawbacks must be atoned for by perseverance; we must fight against old age just as we fight against the force of disease. We must have regard for our health; moderate exercise must be taken, only just so much food and drink used that the strength may be recruited, not oppressed. Nor indeed must the body alone be assisted, but the intellect and the soul, and in a much greater degree; for these also, unless you drop oil on them as on a lamp, are extinguished by old age. And while our bodies grow heavy with the weariness caused by exercise, our minds are rendered buoyant by activity. For as to those whom Caecilius calls "foolish old men of comedy," by these he means the credulous, the forgetful, and dissolute—faults which belong not to old age, but to a lazy, indolent, and sleepy old age. Just as wantonness and lust are faults rather of the young than the old, yet not of all young men, but of those only who are not virtuous, so that foolishness of old age, which is usually called "dotage," is a mark of worthless old men, and not of all.—W. F. MASOM and J. F. STOUT: CICERO: DE SENECTUTE: A TRANSLATION. London, University Tutorial Press Ltd., p. 14.

Ancient Comments on Aging

The old retain their wits, provided their earnestness and energy lasts; and this happens not only with men who are illustrious, and who have held high office, but also in a life of privacy and repose. Sophocles wrote tragedies up to the period of extreme old age; and when, owing to this pursuit, he seemed to be neglecting his property, he was summoned by his sons into court, in order that, just as according to our custom fathers who are ruining their property are wont to be removed from the management of their possessions, so in his case the judges might remove him from the control of his estate as though in his dotage. Then the old man is said to have read out to the judges the play on which he was engaged and which he had last written, the *Oedipus Colônēus*, and to have asked whether that seemed a poem by a man in his dotage; and when it had been read, he was acquitted by the votes of the judges.—W. F. MASOM and J. F. STOUT: CICERO, DE SENECTUTE: A TRANSLATION. London, University Tutorial Press Ltd., p. 9.

Sphinx

The fable adds very prettily that when the Sphinx was subdued, her body was laid on the back of an ass: for there is nothing so subtle and abstruse, but when it is once thoroughly understood and published to the world, even a dull wit can carry it. Nor is that other point to be passed over, that the Sphinx was subdued by a lame man with club feet; for men generally proceed too fast and in too great a hurry to the solution of the Sphinx's riddles; whence it follows that the Sphinx has the better of them, and instead of obtaining the sovereignty by works and effects, they only distract and worry their minds with disputations.—Selected Writings of Francis Bacon: Sphinx or Science. In The Modern Library. New York, Random House, 1955, p. 420.

Inscribed in Padua, 1602

We have listened with immense pleasure of mind to the noble and erudite William Harvey of Folkestone, an Englishman, Councillor of the famous English nation, son of the illustrious Thomas Harvey, learnedly, eloquently, and in a praiseworthy and excellent style discussing the themes in Arts and Medicine, propounded to him by the distinguished and most excellent Doctors of Arts and Medicine, . . . moreover subtly replying to and lucidly resolving the arguments, doubts, and cases brought before him.

And in this examination so wonderfully and most excellently did he conduct himself, and so much force of intellect, memory and learning did he display, that very far surpassing the expectations which he had raised about himself in the minds of all, he was, by the aforesaid distinguished Doctors unanimously and with united voice, and by the votes of all (no single one of them differing in the least, or dissenting, or even hesitating) adjudged competent and perfectly qualified in Arts and Medicine.—Browne, W.: William Harvey's Diploma from Padua. JAMA 197: 127, 1966.


50 Years Ago—Lutembacher’s Syndrome


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A Philosopher's Comment on Angina

My anginoid pain has increased during the past year, tho’ nitro-glycerin stops it like magic. I go to Paris to consult one Dr. Montier, whose high frequency currents have performed a wunder kur on a neighbor of mine (reducing his arterial tension from 230mm to 150 in four applications) with a relief of all his formidable symptoms, that has now been complete for six months! I know of two cases of similar relief by him, tho’ I am unacquainted with the details. It sounds impossible, and I hear that M. is regarded as a quack by medical opinion. Nevertheless I don’t wish to leave that stone unturned, since my own trouble (in which I gladly acknowledge an element of nervous hyper-aesthesia) seems progressive. I will let you know the results!—Letter of William James to William Osler, May 3, 1910—(James died August 26, 1910, age 68).—Ludwig Edelstein: William Osler’s Philosophy. Bull Hist Med 20: 293, 1946.


On Communication with Patients

Now, in all this, while we are observing and trying to understand the patient, we must remember that he is observing and evaluating us. As John Donne remarked in his "Devotions" in 1603, some three hundred and sixty years ago, "I observe the physician with the same diligence as he the disease." Unknowing and unskilled in matters medical, the patient can judge only by the familiar hallmarks of his own experience. He notes whether his physician is like the surgeons of medieval times who washed their hands only once—after the operation was over. The patient observes whether the physician places the stethoscope over the mitral area, seems to lose himself in reflection and then reapplies and reapplies this instrument. After several such reapplications the patient surely ponders the meaning of this stammering performance by the physician with a wandering pacemaker. If the physician then emerges from his reverie and proudly announces, "everything is normal," the patient may well experience the same perplexity as the traveler visiting Hong Kong who beheld this somewhat disconcerting sign displayed by a hotel on the waterfront: "Stay with us—we overlook everything."—Herrman L. Blumgart: Caring for the Patient. New Eng J Med 270: 449, 1964.
Early Investigation on Glomerular Filtration

When I got into the problem of trying to withdraw glomerular fluid, the work proved to be so delicate that we could not have interruptions or even heavy footsteps that shook the apparatus. Therefore, I began to work at night when the only visitors to my laboratory were a friendly mouse and an occasional cockroach.

Richards came in on one evening and, seeing the light in my laboratory, looked in and from that time on throughout the time I worked with him, he came into the laboratory frequently for long hours of uninterrupted work in the evenings.

A preliminary report of our findings was made in Edinburgh at the International Physiological Congress in 1923. We took American frogs with us but they did not survive the crossing of the Atlantic, and when I prepared to set up a demonstration of a glomerular puncture, I had to use Scotch frogs. Richards arranged for a quiet room and I had a very difficult time getting the preparation ready as the Scotch frogs were very thrifty with their glomerular filtrate.—Joseph T. Wearn: Acceptance of the Kober Medal for 1965. Trans Ass Amer Physicians 78: 50, 1965.
of blood vessels in the resting hand and forearm to various stimuli. Amer Heart J 19: 541, 1940.


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On Style

Style, in its finest sense, is the last acquirement of the educated mind; it is also the most useful. . . Style is the ultimate morality of mind . . . with style the end is attained without side issues, without raising undesirable inflammations. With style you attain your end and nothing but your end. With style the effect of your activity is calculable, and foresight is the last gift of gods to men. With style your power is increased, for your mind is not distracted with irrelevancies, and you are more likely to attain your object. Now style is the exclusive privilege of the expert.—ALFRED NORTH WHITEHEAD: The Aims of Education and Other Essays. New York, Macmillan Co., 1959, p. 19.


