

ON GROWING OLD

BY ROBERT L. RAYMOND

REALLY old age must have its compensations, indeed its positive blessings; and in the security of feeling that things are somehow completed, the heat and toil of the day being past, must be a pleasant port in which to lie a while at anchor before hoisting sail for the last long voyage to the unknown.

Grow old along with me!
The best is yet to be;

Young, all lay in dispute; I shall know, being old.
A sober time, perhaps, but serene and ripe.

I have not this in mind, but rather what I think must be a much more trying period: growing old in the sense of passing from late youth to early middle age; say those years from thirty-five to forty, though to some the experience I wish to suggest comes earlier, and to a few perhaps later.

Always, by the calendar and by succeeding birthdays and anniversaries, we know that the years are passing. Ordinarily, however, there is no element of surprise, nothing strange or poignant about the course of time. It is recognized rather than felt, and is registered by the intellect and not by the emotions.

Passing from youth to middle age is something very different. The moment when one first feels acutely that he is no longer young, is bound to make one pause in something akin to consternation. For vividness it is like a flash of lightning in a black sky. Life no longer is all before one; even more dreadful thought, it may be mostly behind!

After the first keen realization there follows a bewildered state of mind due to unwillingness, yes, to an actual puzzled inability to accept the truth. With all the agony of the startled call of a child at night, the heart cries out, 'It cannot be; it is not so.' Youth dies hard, and fights and struggles in its dying like an imprisoned bird. Others, even those near and dear, are older, are even old; we can see that. But how can the stubborn facts be true as to ourselves? Very gradually, little by little, fighting its way inch by inch, the truth prevails and gnaws at the heart, — though only intermittently, of course, — until time numbs this emotion as it does every other one.

The blow strikes a man in his ambitions, his feelings, and his spiritual nature. I do not think the merely physical phase is important. Inability to turn handsprings or do a backward dive does not hurt much. It is the other things which count.

It is well if the first realization does not bring panic with it. It is a time when youthful hopes and early promise must be tested by actual performance. The fact that there is any occasion as yet for doing this is itself an unwelcome surprise, and the result is apt to be disconcerting.

One finds that he has been out of college twenty years, that he has practiced law perhaps for nearly as long a time. What has he done? What has happened, granting that the incredible facts be true?

Mr. Chalk in Jacobs's *Dialstone Lane*

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makes the remark: 'I'm fifty-one next year, and the only thing I ever had happen to me was seeing a man stop a runaway horse and cart.' Even one who has had a busy, happy life feels a little that way when he compares what actually is with early hopes.

Fortunately few of us aspire to careers of precocious greatness, but even so it is annoying at just this period of life to recall that at forty-five Napoleon had lost the battle of Waterloo; that all the best books of Dickens had been published before he was forty; that Samuel Pepys made the last entry in his diary at the age of thirty-seven. Nearer home, and therefore more startling to me, came the experience of rereading the life of a maternal great uncle who was killed by a pro-slavery mob in the stormy days preceding the Civil War. From childhood I have always pictured this hero as a patriarch to whom the appellation 'Venerable Man' might most appropriately be applied; and yet history says that at the time of his death he was thirty-four years old.

One has reached a time of life when it is hardly one thing or the other. The past years have not been so many as to permit one to lay down his arms and retreat in quiet to the shade. It is still not too late to strive and perhaps to achieve. On the other hand so much dusty road has been traveled that if one finds it has not led him far on the way he meant to go, he can hardly delude himself with the fancy that he may yet go back and begin the journey anew. The pleasant sense of superfluous time is gone; one must hurry; and perhaps it is too late!

Then comes the grief of perceiving the waste, the loss, the utter futility of postponements. The world is full of good and wonderful things. What a wealth of potential experience and emotions; and time and opportunity for so little! And yet year after year one goes

on blindly and blandly putting off to some more convenient or appropriate time, to that impossible period when all will be exactly right, things he wants to do and can do,—a kind action, making a new friend, or altering a whole career! Once acquired, the habit of postponing persists. Hope springs eternal; and a man of forty finds himself counting complacently on some day taking up hunting, or entering politics, or circling the globe.

Perhaps the most dreadful part of all is to feel that the early hopes remain fresh and vigorous when so much time has gone forever. As a solace for this, one begins to wonder if after all the true way of life is not to accept with what contentment one may what has been called the philosophy of the 'second best.' That is not so bad as a scheme of life for the future. To realize, on reflection, that unconsciously this has been one's own philosophy for many years is not so pleasant.

Years and experience bring, I think, a more tolerant and kindly disposition toward others. It is easier to forgive. The ready willingness of youth to condemn has unconsciously and little by little faded away. With this broader charity to others there comes, I am afraid, a tendency to be easy on one's self. The niceness of discrimination as to one's own conduct is rubbed off, and the freshness and purity of early years is worn away. Youth hopes all, demands all, and expects all. Middle age is content to put up with what comes readily to hand. That any but really bad people govern their actions by ulterior motives of worldliness, greed, or selfish ambition is hardly conceivable in youth. Yet middle age sees with an uncritical and accustomed eye such conduct every day in those whom it welcomes as friends and knows to be good. I do not say that the high expectation of youth is wiser or saner than the tolerance of

middle age. It is better, I agree with Stevenson, occasionally to swallow a camel than forever to be straining at gnats. I am concerned only in emphasizing different points of outlook on life, and in suggesting that there is an element of sadness in the loss of even impossible hopes.

It is well, of course, to take life as easily as possible; it is a mistake to be too serious. I agree that the sensation of growing old often rises only to the dignity of an annoyance. When all is said and done, however, to one with perception enough to realize what has happened, the yearning for a lost youth is like the sudden yearning which comes at times for a lost friend; and it takes some fortitude to go on in cheerfulness. Fortunate it is that we are helped by happy memories.

There comes a day at the end of summer, every year, which somehow seems to write the word 'Finis' to all the gaiety and joyousness of that pleasant season. That day is not dependent on any calendar reckoning. It may come at any place, and in any environment. Without precise reason one feels suddenly that this particular summer is over and gone, and experiences a sense of regret and gentle melancholy, such as one may also feel in less degree at the end of a perfect day. For a moment the future looks cold and uninviting, and hardly to be borne. Yet life goes on without a break, and autumn succeeds to summer and winter succeeds to autumn. The cool, bracing fall days are found to be not without their own especial charm, and, better still, perhaps, are very good to work in. Even winter, taking away some of the zest of either work or play with its icy blasts,

is the best time of all for quiet indoor companionship or contemplation before the fire on the hearth. So we get through the year comfortably, if not with the glow and enthusiasm which seem to depart when summer is past. And in the autumn and in the winter, too, come bright flashes of memory of summer scenes and emotions. For a moment the warm sun shines again, the ship, with glittering canvas spread, sails out over the blue water, the dear companions are near once more, and the peace which passeth understanding settles on the spirit.

Something like that happens in the autumn and winter of life. Youth has gone perhaps in actual fact, but can never die in memory. Imaginary things, in a way, are as real and vital as tangible objects; sometimes their effect is as great, and often the pleasure they give is infinitely greater than that received from what we can touch or see or hear. Thinking is a more refined joy than eating or drinking; dreaming is a more delicate process than even thinking; and of moments in youth there lingers the shadow of a thought, the ghost of a dream to which the whole being responds as it were to a chord of music or to the odor of violets in early spring.

More precious than rubies and pearls are the times in early years which first set the fibres in tune with never-to-be-forgotten joys; for they are the source of happiness distilled for the spirit, ethereal, tenuous like a ray of light; and the memory of those times is not recollection but sensation.

So the autumn and winter of life are brightened, though there is to be no other spring.

THE HOUSE ON HENRY STREET

IV. CHILDREN AND WORK

BY LILLIAN D. WALD

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BESSIE has had eight 'jobs' in six months. Obviously under sixteen, she has had to produce her 'working papers' before she could be taken on. The fact that she has met the requirements necessary to obtain the papers, and that her employer has demanded them, is evidence of the advance made in New York State since we first became acquainted with the children of the poor. Bessie has had to prove by birth certificate or other documentary evidence that she is really fourteen, has had to submit to a simple test in English and arithmetic, present proof of at least 130 days' school attendance in the year before leaving, and, after examination by a medical officer, has had to be declared physically fit to enter shop or factory.

No longer could Annie, the cobbler's daughter, by unchallenged perjury obtain the state sanction to her premature employment. Gone are the easy days when Francesca's father, defying school mandates, openly offered his little ones in the labor market. Yet we are far from satisfied. Bessie, though she meets the requirements of the law, goes out wholly unprepared for self-support; she is of no industrial value, and is easily demoralized by the conviction of her unimportance to her 'boss,' certain that her casual employment and dismissal have hardly been noted, save as

she herself has been affected by the pay envelope. Her industrial experience is no surprise to her settlement friends, for she is a type of the boys and girls who, twice a year, swarm out of the schools and find their way to the Department of Health to obtain working papers. Bessie's father is a phthisis case; her mother, the chief wage-earner, an example of devotion and industry. The girl has been a fairly good student and dutiful in the home, where for several years she has scrubbed the floors and 'looked after' the children in her mother's absence.

Tommy also appeared at the office with his credentials and successfully passed all the tests, until the scale showed him suspiciously weighty for his appearance. Inquiry as to what bulged one of his pockets disclosed the fact that he had a piece of lead there. He had been told that he probably would not weigh enough to pass the doctor. Talking the matter over with Mrs. Sanderson, I learned that the immediate reason for taking Tommy out of school was his need of a pair of shoes. The mother was not insensitive to his pinched appearance. A few days later Tommy was taken to visit our children at the farm, and it was pleasant to see that the natural boy had not been crushed. He devoured the most juvenile story-books and was 'crazy' about the sledding. The self-respecting mother was not injured in her pride or inde-