

On The Pleasure of No
Longer Being Very Young

P21

(G.K. Chesterton)

A critical appreciation of Chesterton's essay On the pleasure of no longer being very young.

"On the Pleasure of No Longer Being Very Young" is a fine essay which is written by G.K. Chesterton. Through this essay the writer wants to express that the advantages of growing old are seldom stated in a sensible way. Much of sentiment obscures the issue; much of false idealization goes into it. The result is that young people are really sceptical about the advantages of old age. Chesterton does not mean to say that old men grow wise. On the other hand, he asserts that elderly men are much more romantic and adventurous than younger people. Some of the advantages of growing old, if stated correctly, will sound like para

doxes.

Chesterton's own view on such advantages.

One of the advantages is that the world seems to be growing younger and lovelier to a man advancing in years. Traditions, institutions, proverbs and manners, which seemed once effect and lifeless, take on a new meaning. To a young man the world has little beauty and seems to be worn out. Proverbs which have become stale by repetition, are found, by a man growing old, to contain an element of truth which he missed when young. Not until Chesterton had a dog of his own, did he understand the meaning of the proverb 'Let a sleeping dog die'. Not until he lived in the country, did the meaning of the proverb - 'It's as the wind that blows nobody good' come home to him.

The questioning look that industrial and material prosperity now wears, never seems to impress a young man. But an elderly man realizes it. The maxims that fortune is fickle, that riches cannot be kept, that power is fugitive, that pride goes before a fall, that insolence invites the wrath of the gods are quite meaningless to a young man, or rather they are not taken seriously by a young man. But experience of years shows them to be as true as life; and their validity cannot be ignored by a person who knows the world. The examples of the fall of Whorsey from power, of the disaster of Napoleon at Moscow of the futility of ambition as shown in the career of Charles the Fifth, or of tyranny as shown in the execution of Charles the First do not hit the heights of the young. They need to be brought home to an individual by personal experience. Experi-

ence indeed is the true revelation. The proverbs and maxims which embody the wisdom of ages, can hardly be realized to be crystallized truths unless one has gone through a considerable part of life.

The new world remains an enigma to the young (Paragraph 5). It is not the young, but the old who realize the new world. The old men see things in their true perspective. The young seem to have stepped on to a moving platform, of the movement of which they seem to be hardly conscious. The young see only the dim, shadowy background; the old see the things relieved sharply against the background. To take an example; a young man at present will laugh at the idea of men regularly going to church in these days. But the oldest inhabitant of the parish knows that the Church which was practically empty in the days of his

childhood, is filling up again in his old age. An odder instance: the younger generation scoffs at the idea of the existence of a ghost. Now a man of science like Sir Oliver Lodge is demonstrating, not only existence of the ghost, but also the possibility of communication between the living and the dead.

Chesterton is fond of paradoxes. It is in a series of paradoxes that he sets forth the advantages of growing old. He would have nothing to do with the rose coloured, sentimental picture that is drawn of old age. At the outset he states that he does not believe old men ever grow wise. That is certainly a paradox, for we are apt to associate wisdom with old age. A still more startling paradox follows when Chesterton says that old men are more romantic and adventurous than young people. And he caps it with a total reversal of the paradox.

of the young in a statement like this: 'Perhaps there is no fool who is half so happy in his own fool's paradise' So the tables are turned upon the young. Yet it may be noted that we have to assent to the intrinsic truth contained in Chesterton's paradoxes. They do not seem to be results of hasty generalizations.

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